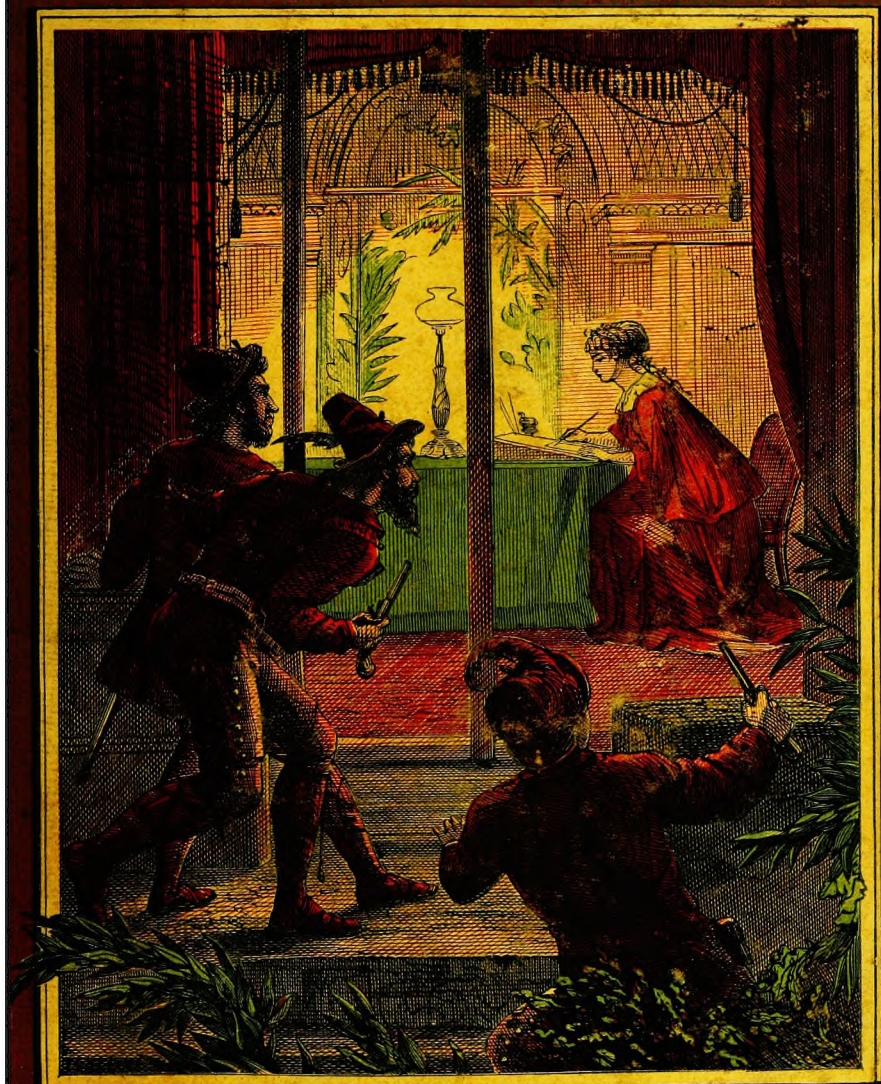


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A STORY.

BY

PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A.,

AUTHOR OF "BELLA DONNA," "NEVER FORGOTTEN," ETC.

NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

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BOOK THE FIRST.

SIR JOHN DIGBY.



SEVENTY-FIVE BROOKE STREET.

CHAPTER I.

DIGBY.

T was now a gray evening, when a day in a Christmas week was all but done, when the air was fresh and cool, and of that pleasant tone which seems almost the colour of aluminium—the most delightful hour in the day for brisk walking—when, too, there was a little stiff film of frost rather than snow on all things, a crackling under foot, faint edging, and the finest lines of white, tipping every branch, with an exquisite delicacy that no human touch could ever hope to imitate; and when the plantations, stripped of every leaf, standing out on the white background, seemed to be distant shipping with masts and dark net-work of fine rigging, lying up in great docks. Sometimes a faint breath of air came, and a light shower of white snow floated down leisurely and softly. The pond near the mill, partly frozen, looked like a sheet of cold, polished black marble. Already on the hill side was a light or two twinkling; and on what was called in summer “the green lane,” the wheels of the doctor’s gig were clattering afar off as if on a causeway of steel.

About an hour before, the guns had been heard in the

plantation. Hodge and his friend sauntering home beside the heavy cart—a two-horse cart in tandem fashion—had said to each other that “they were shootin’ up i’ the Bigger”—meaning a pet and costly plantation where pheasants lived crowded together rather too closely for comfort. The Bigger was certainly some three or four miles from “th’ ’Ouse,” as the chief mansion of the district was called, and between it the country eddied up and down a good deal—up, to the swelling hill, the top of which was capped by a sort of dark plantation, but looked like a fortress, it was so straightly enclosed with a stone wall; and down again into the open valley and the brook, now caught in the cold gripe of the frost and kept prisoner. The gentlemen from “th’ ’Ouse” were seen afar off (by another Hodge with *his* cart) coming down slowly, a little scattered—some four or five—a couple of keepers with guns and dogs, and behind all some half a dozen serfs or beaters, who had run the risk of their lives several times in that day from the guns of a raw and agitated young sportsman. Above all there was a large bag; for many a noble bird—black, rich, and solid of plumage, had come *staggering* down heavily; who as he lay plunging and dying on the ground, fixed on his destroyers a glowing, glittering eye, as bright certainly as many a human eye.

Two of the gentlemen were walking together in front. They were the freshest of the party. They were talking eagerly. The one who spoke most was a young man of about twenty, with a very Italian face, with black hair and moustache, and a handsome, olive-toned face. His friend was a very strong and robustly-made man, good looking from mere excess of health. He was about five-and-twenty. “We have done very well for Sir John’s birds, at least for one day,” said the dark young man. “I really enjoy it. I feel happy—ready to set off, and run, and shout.”

The other was lighting a cigar in a very ponderous and leisurely way—a plain, satisfactory man, of little speech, who helped on a talk by the lever of a word or two, that somehow was as useful as a sentence.

"Wish I could feel like that," he said.

"So you do, Selby," said the young man, "and so you can ; so can anyone. It is as easy to be happy as miserable. Charming world—delicious world. It seems to me there is nothing but love, money, health, books, travels, enjoyment—in too much abundance."

The other nodded.

"Right enough," he said.

"And do you know this—what do you make of the shabby scoundrels that abuse it, that talk of it as a hollow world, and a cold world, and empty world?"

"Apples of the Dead Sea, eh?" said Selby, with a cough.

"No ridicule, Sir, of my Great Thinker," the young man said, half seriously. "There are good apples, too. Cold, hollow, and empty ! Why, I say it is warm, round, and full—oh ! *so* full—*too* full."

"Regular Epicurean, I declare, Severne," said his friend.

"I am, I boast. I have never had an hour's trouble in my life ; and I assure you a great deal of that is from a *purpose not* to let myself be put out in any way. I began that at school, my dear fellow, and never had a day's trouble. What was the result? My school-days were the happiest in the world ; and I go back there, and shall go back there every year of my life. When we meet each other we have plays and games, and are boys again."

"All right," said the other ; "quite right."

"To be sure it's all right," said young Severne. "I have been happy ever since, too ; and by Jove on high, I am so happy to-night—hang all bashfulness and shyness. You know me like a book, Selby—you do."

"Well, I know about *that*," said Selby. "Palmer's coming—aren't they?"

"They are," said the young man ; "that is, Alice Palmer ; for her mother, to tell you the truth, depresses me—that air of 'seen better days,' you know. Some-way when people *have* seen better days, I always get impatient. Why couldn't they keep them?"

"*You'll* have better days in plenty and keep them too. That's the thing," said the other. "When are they due?"

"For dinner, they said," answered Severne. "Don't you think they'll come?"

"Well, I suppose they will," said the other; "people always like to be in for dinner. Come from Boulogne, don't they, all the way?" he asked.

"To be sure they do," answered the other, warmly. "And look here, Selby, you stout fossil of a bachelor—you don't know what may come of all this."

"I don't know, indeed," said the other; "on my soul I don't."

"No you don't," said the other, gaily; "how should you? *You* were never struck down in a raging French town by a sun-stroke, and picked up and carried into an English house, to be nursed for six weeks by as charming a blossom, as divine an angel, as ever got furlough from Heaven's chancery."

"Ah, this is Keats and Tennyson line,"—said his friend.

"I want to be happy, you know. Every fellow that wants to be happy should marry young. My father married young; so did *his* father; so did his——"

"But what will mamma say, my dear fellow? she means you to be a Cabinet Minister, Governor-General of India. You *know* she does."

"Pooh! my dear clear-eyed friend. Don't you know that what I like is what *she* likes? That I am a joss or an idol for her; that if she was asked for a joint of every limb to secure me an additional week's life she would give it?—I am safe *there*, my dear friend."

"Glad of it," said his friend. "I *am* rather stupid. Hallo, Peters, you went near singeing me to-day. You really must take care. No gentleman can go out with you with comfort to his life. You sent all the blood to my face."

This was addressed to a very tall and limp youth, who, however deficient in some portions of the pastime, was certainly scrupulously correct in costume, or in all points

that might be regarded as the *matériel* of shooting. If knicker-bockers and heather mixture stockings, and straps, and pouches, and boxes, could make a man shoot, he was an admirable shot indeed. His name was Peters.

"I didn't know you were so near," said Peters, screwing his glass into his eye, to look at his piece, "and these Le Faucher guns——"

"Now don't lay it upon the poor gun," said a strong thick-set well-knit officer, who came walking up quickly. "I say, just see the way he is looking at it, as if it was a mad dog or a restive horse. They're good guns enough, though they *are* made by a Frenchman; but the old English rifle for me. I tell you, you were near making potted ham of me at the corner of that hedge. I give you my honour I heard the shot in the bushes. Look here, Mr. Peters, either you or I stay at home to-morrow."

"Philips, now let Peters alone," said young Severne, good-humouredly. "Recollect we all had to begin."

"Then I wish he'd begin with some one else but me. It's no joke at all. I was as near being missing for Mrs. Philips and the children, about 3 P.M., this day, as ever I was."

Captain Philips, quartered not far off, with Mrs. Philips and the children, was a specimen of the *comfortable married officer*—a race that cared more for comforts than for amusements, and are to the mass of officers what a country gentleman is to ordinary young men. He therefore vigorously resented this "attempt on his life," as he always would call it (alluding to it afterwards in the smoking-room), making a sort of grievance.

"He should get himself taught, just as we send men into the school to ride. You know a fellow of that sort is a public enemy. Why, what would my insurance agent say to me if I was to tell him I habitually went out with an unskilful fellow of that sort? It would vitiate the policy on the spot. I vow to you, Miss Fenton, here was I at the turn of the road just where I made Wilkins put me; and I heard the bird coming on through the wood, and would have nailed him as he came out, when

there came a whisking sound in the bushes, not a yard from my elbow. I declare it gave me a turn. If the man had fired at me directly, I don't think he'd have gone nearer, or perhaps so near—ha, ha! But it won't do, you know. Not at all."

Now they were passing through swinging gates, getting into paddocks and farmyards, and still greater courts, where there were the offices, and forges, and stabling, and a sort of little domestic town, with a tall tower, in the middle of which the pigeons and a great clock were tenants in common. This was towards the back of Digby; and by the old clock, whose striking was a little interfered with by the fluttering of the pigeons, it was past six o'clock. Then they were presently going along the whitewashed, almost subterranean passages—for Digby was a great establishment—to the gamekeepers' room, where they gave up their guns.

"Now to dress," said Severne, "and not much time either." They turned out again into the open course round by the front of the house. It was a shorter and more agreeable way to the rooms, and on the steps were met by the master of the house, Sir John Barton Digby, of Digby, as he used to sign himself, and as indeed he was set out in Sir Bernard's excellent *Liber Aureus*; leaning, too, on the arm of his friend the Dean of Bermondsey.

"Hallo!" cried the Baronet. "How's the shootin' been? I hope you have sacked my birds? One bag? Ah! Bags—bags, Sir, used to be the way; and bursting bags, too."





CHAPTER II.

DIGBY AND ITS GUESTS.

DIGBY was rising over their heads as they stood on the steps, and quite overshadowed them. A kind of half Italian building, a square centre tower with an archway leading into a court, and two stone wings, ended by smaller square towers. From the centre rose two open cupolas or belfries, capped by great stone eagles. It was a fine building. Looking into "Dutton's County History," the reader will find a whole account of what Dutton calls "this spacious pile," with its date, circa Charles the Second, its architect, Vecchi, then held in much fashion and repute, and a very minute account of its labyrinths, gardens, ponds, statues, &c., laid out in the French manner, under the direction of Van Citters, pupil, it was said, of the famous Le Pâtre. In return for this description of his house, the Digby of Dutton's day could not do less than take ten large paper copies of Dutton's work.

Already were the red curtains drawn across, and lamps lighted in all the bed-rooms; and the dispensary doctor, whose horse's hoofs were chinking musically down the long bare avenue between the porches, might have comforted himself by fancying he was drawing near to a glowing fireplace, crossed by the mullions of the old windows as if they were bars.

The pleasant sight was in the square court, into which looked what was called the Long Room or Picture Gallery, which ran down a whole side. This was a sort

of drawing-room, a little "draughty," perhaps, in these frosty times; but Sir John Digby insisted always on this tribute being paid to old customs, piled up a good fire with dried logs from his plantation, and gathered in his guests here for ten or twenty minutes or so before breakfast and dinner. The guests were now dropping in.

Captain Philips almost first down, and sitting in a leather-backed arm-chair—well into the fire—alone, audibly objected to this arrangement.

"I don't see the point of it," he said, "forcing a lot of ladies and gentlemen into a great vault like this. It aint fair, you know. 'Pon my word, if I get back my lumbago this winter, I know on whose shoulders to lay it. Ugh! Now that little snugery on the stairs is just the thing—just the thing. Why should we be getting cold in our joints—all from an old, absurd custom? Dinner seems later to-day, I think. How's time, Dean?"

Dean Burnaby was entering, had come up gratefully to the fire, shivering a little, and then, as it were, opened out all his arms and large figure to take in all its warmth. He was a very gigantic, florid-faced dignitary, almost awkward and unwieldy from his size. It was pleasant to see him walking, rolling, and swinging along; and he was certainly the tallest ecclesiastic of his diocese.

"Well," he said, "Captain Philips, we are a little late. Our ladies are getting on their marriage garments—Ha—hem!" he added, breaking into a soft smile, "I recollect so well at Cross Towers, the old lord, who always said whatever came into his head—a little coarse and strong, between you and me—but a good man, long gone to his account. 'Well,' he said, on a similar occasion, 'don't hurry the girls. You wouldn't have 'em come down in their *smocks*!'" And the Dean looked round cautiously, to be sure that no one was listening. He had one long leg up on the hob).

"Ah, Miss Fenton, *you* are in excellent time."

The two sisters came rustling in—gay, lively, "officer's girls"—excellent furniture for a country house, with a cowed and helpless mamma. "Rattlers," some called them, and "good jolly girls;" and other critics—female

chiefly—lifted up their eyes with a “Well, I suppose it is all right ; it will come all right.” They were thoroughly business-like, and were even careful as to the objects of their conversation ; for words, we know, are sometimes as dear as gold and silver ; and time, again, is money ; and many an opportunity is lost and wasted unprofitably, which might have brought all manner of blessings.

“We had a very pleasant day,” said the elder, Isabella, settling down her dress, and taking a twisted view down her back.

“Very pleasant indeed. Mr. Canby rode over from Ripley, and we took him over the place, and—and do you know—such a funny thing,” interrupted her sister, “we got shut up in the tower ; the old door got fixed in some way, and I assure you Mr. Canby with all his strength could not stir it.”

“You should have all tried together,” said the Dean. “Union, you know, is strength. You remember the story of the faggots—a man——”

“Oh, Isabella was on the other side of the door,” said her sister, laughing. “I and Mr. Canby had run on in front. She could not keep up with us.”

Here were more guests. Their cowed mamma—delicate and timid, “enjoying” wretched health ; an agreeable and youngish barrister—Vernon Jones—better known and in sharper practice at country houses than at Westminster ; a London doctor—“young Peters”—who had been so wild in his shooting in the morning ; Mr. Monkhouse, M.P., a tall, pink-coloured bachelor, with a large rudely-cut nose, and the old “mutton-chop” whisker ; and Mrs. Severne, the mother of the young man who had been out shooting—a woman, graceful, elegant, and with this grown up son, looking absolutely no more than five-and-thirty, with a small head and face exquisitely shaped, fair features, shaped like a cameo, and the full cheeks of a girl ; this was the well-known Mrs. Severne, who had been a sort of political beauty years ago, whose husband had been Secretary at War in a Cabinet of thirty years ago, and who, herself, was said to have “pulled the wires” in all sorts of combinations,

and very many of those wires too. Last of all came in Sir John Digby himself, in a blue coat and gilt buttons, and an enormous white stock of the days of Lord Melbourne or Canning.

"Dinner, eh! All right," he said. "Now, Mrs. Severne—these Palmers will not be here to-night; omnibus has just come back from the station."

They went on in a long procession through the galleries, lit up here and there with a stray oil-lamp, but rather dark. As the way was long they marched quickly.

"We are like a regiment going to a review," said Miss Fanny Fenton to Mr. Canby.

"By Jove, yes," said the gentleman. "Isn't it? Quick march! Left shoulders forward! Dress by your right there!" And the wit, throwing his hearer into convulsions, proceeded to work his joke all the way. Captain Philips had put the collar of his coat up about his neck as he went along.

"We'll have pains in our bones all next week for this," he said. "Hot air apparatus don't cost so much after all; and if people will ask people to these old-fashioned, rambling dens of discomfort, they should warm 'em up a bit. Why, there's Smith and Lankester, Soho, 'ill put you up the whole affair, pipes, biler" (so he pronounced it), "hot wharter" (so he pronounced it), "lock, stock, and barrel complete, for, I suppose, one hundred and fifty. Ugh, there, it's down my back again."

This was all addressed to the timid mother of the Fentons, who agreed that Smith and Lankester, Soho, should have been called in.

When they were arranged on both sides of the long table in the large hall, and half of that room cut off by huge curtains, and two great fires roaring away like blast furnaces at each end, the Captain let down his collar, and said that this was "more Christian-like. Still," he added, settling his napkin, preparing his bread, glasses, &c., so as to be commodious and handy for the meal—"still, it's not the place for human beings to dine in. What's this?" he added, distrustfully, as two plates were held over his arm. "Clear soup—get me the clear.

Take my advice, Mrs. Fenton—have clear soup. *His* cook can do that."

At the other end of the table was Sir John himself, with his leading guests about him—Mrs. Severne, Dean Burnaby, and lower down, Severne, his friend Selby, and some "locals," as the young men called guests from the district—beings known by numbers merely in the rolls of social life, but to whom the young men were very attentive. Mrs. Severne's fine face, as seen illuminated by the soft lamplight, struck these honest rustics; and a stout young farming gentleman, in a torrent of enthusiasm, asked, "Who that lovely girl up yonder was?"

Sir John's voice was heard very often, and very loud, and his tall, thin figure gave him facilities for projecting it down the table.

"I don't know what it will come to," he said; "they may make ducks and drakes of the country if they like for what I care. There's no *principle* now in the government. I declare to you, Dean, it's frightful—frightful. It keeps me awake in my bed. There's that man at the Exchequer—a fellow that I wouldn't trust to go in with a cheque to the next market—a fellow that, in a lower rank of life, I would take and put on the wheel, and give seven years to over and over again."

"There is indeed a want of principle in our rulers of to-day," said Dean Burnaby, placidly, "and I recollect the present Lord Anglestre making a remark of the same sort in *his own library* just standing before the fireplace;" and seeing a rustic lady greatly impressed by this last part, he added softly, "and on the rug."

"Oh! that's very well—very well," said Sir John, angrily. "Anglestre and his whole gang may talk that way, but it's their own infernal doing. It's got among them like a rot, Sir. Liberal, indeed! *Liberal!* That's the name? I say it's low, mean, vulgar, crawling, and immoral. I call spades spades. It's a *disgrace* to these men—men of good blood—bowing down to take up low filthy blackguards, that you wouldn't ask into your house, or be seen speaking to—Equality! Faugh! But wait, I say, until these creatures rise up and massacre us all."

Mrs. Severne now spoke in a wonderfully sweet voice.

"I hope we shall not live to see these horrors," she said; "but I wish our people could get in. We are famishing in sight of meat and drink. I am praying and pining for it, for the most unselfish motives."

"You may pray and pray, my good Madam," said he to her; "it will be no use. I say the country is going clean to pot. It's all the fault of our men sitting down to dinner, talking with rascals that by-and-by will be taking my land and your land, and dividing it among 'em. Some Manchester blackguard will be sitting here in this chair one of these days," he added, excitedly.

The other laughed.

"It's a very serious thing, Sir," said Sir John, with more feeling. "I suppose it will last out *my* day. But the poor old country, I am very sorry for it. I, Sir, have seen the good old days when we were all gentlemen, and you sat down with gentlemen, and rascals were kept down well in their places. My goodness!—to think I should have lived into such times. But after that FATAL step of Peel's in '20," added the Baronet, dropping his voice, "what could you expect? We are handed over, bound neck and crop, to—Rome." (This dreadful word the Baronet always pronounced in a low broken voice, as if it was spelt "Row-home.")

"The encroachments of that power," said the Dean, "are certainly calculated to afford grave alarm. It was only last week that Sir Henry Plumer, who, as we all know, is a man of advanced Liberal principles——"

"Liberal grandmother!" said the Baronet, really angry; "I am surprised at you, Dean. This man's a disgrace, a dishonour to his name. He's lost his caste. When I meet him I declare to Heaven I'll cut him like this bit of salmon. Why, Sir, if he was in India he might stick those hooks into his armpits, and be swung up, and it wouldn't give him back his caste. He's a dirty fellow, and I always said so. Mark my words, you'll hear of that man in—er—something with the police. I say nothing now."

He *had* said a good deal, but the Dean struck in, softly—

“I was a little surprised at the change in his opinions; but I suspect he is sorry now.”

“Finds his fingers dirty, and wants to wash ‘em,” said the Baronet, contemptuously. “Let him, if he can.”

“But when *are* we to be in?” said Mrs. Severne; “that is what I am dying to know.”

“When we learn to behave as gentlemen and associate with gentlemen,” said the Baronet; “it’ll come round by itself. That young fellow of yours, I am glad to see, he is a gentleman still. How long he may stay so, Heaven knows.”

“I have no fears about him,” said Mrs. Severne. “My dear Sir John, we have an inducement to retain our principles, not given to all. Harold is to have a little office when we do come in.”

“I have no doubt but that Mr. Harold Severne has a very brilliant career before him. Only last month the present Bishop of Leighton Buzzard—Brindley, you know, who was fellow and tutor of All Souls—spoke really in a very high manner of him.”

“As for that, Dean,” said Mrs. Severne, smiling, “I don’t at all take it as a compliment. He’s a most singular genius, is Harold. Anything he chooses to turn his mind to, he can shine in. As for Double Firsts and Wranglers, I don’t mind that. There are hundreds of your dull men have done that sort of thing.”

“A mistake, my good lady,” said the Baronet; “look at Peel, before he fell; look at Eldon; look at Percival; look at Wellington—every man of ‘em—read their classics, and made their verses like gentlemen; and every one of ‘em wasn’t ashamed to take his glass of old wine. Now we must learn to speak Frog French and Dutch. And Castlereagh was the man. ‘D— —n their lingo!’ said he once to old Sir Tatton, when he was going out to Vienna, ‘I’ll *make* ‘em understand me,’ and faith he did. But your Harold there—now that I think of it, I don’t quite know his principles—what he’s at. The young fellows of this day may be all Jesuits, for what I know.”

"He is rather reserved," said Mrs. Severne, rather warmly; "even with me. Of course, I know he'll go with anything his father thought right: but, as he says, very properly, he should like to study it, and make himself up in the matter before starting, and that seems only reasonable."

"Reasonable! I don't know that," said Sir John, with a growl. "Why shouldn't he know? I don't understand thinking and looking about one in such things. Suppose he comes next to make up his mind about our glorious religion, as by law established. Must we give him time for that?"

"God forbid!" said the Dean. "The extent to which those impious persons push their doubts is appalling, criticising the sacred——"

"They ought to get the cat's tail, and a warm scourging once a week; that would text them. But I tell you what, Ma'am, there must be no mistake about our young friend. No milk and water here. None of your weak tipples of 'advanced' Conservatism and Rubbish. He must be sound wind and limb, Ma'am."

"The fly of the apothecary, Mrs. Severne," said the Dean, pleasantly: "we know the results as regards the ointment. No, our young friend, so brilliant and clever beyond his years, has, I have reason to know, the soundest principles—the good stern old sense of *unflinching*, *uncompromising* duty."

"You should marry him, Ma'am," said the Baronet; "plant him firmly down in a sound family. You know what I mean."

"Not much money," said Mrs. Severne, smiling; "but enormous influence, good name and connection."

"Influence is better than money," said the Dean, plaintively; "for connection is as good as—let me see—say thousands a-year."

"To be sure it is," said the Baronet, in better humour.

"We'll talk to him. Never fear; he's a fine fellow; we'll get him somebody—that is, if he is *sound*, you know."

"We have thought of all that, Sir John," said Mrs.

Severne, confidentially. "You know the Lindens? Well, a younger daughter—niece to the Buryshafts—they can do anything, you know."

Then the conversation went off on Lord Buryshaft, who, the Baronet said, had the "true stuff" in him, and who the Dean pronounced to be "a truly apostolic man." "I never heard a layman read prayers like him. Such *soul* in his voice, you know. No wonder," added the Dean, looking round mysteriously, "they consider him in the Appointments. I met him once at Lord Henry's, and had a great deal of conversation with him. Oh! a great deal. Lord Henry said to me, as we went in to dinner, '*That* man is the *salt* of England.' I thought it a very happy expression."

Thus the dinner went on. Harold Severne got rather silent towards the end. He was disappointed, perhaps, that the expected guests had not come. There was, indeed, another train, towards eleven, and the omnibus was to go down again. It was a private station, literally forced on Sir John, to his infinite disgust. Every day that he heard the shriek of the passing train, he uttered a solemn malediction on the company.

"We are expecting some friends, Miss Fenton," said Harold, in explanation, "all the way from France. I can assure you I should not be sitting here but for them—not that that concerns anyone beyond myself."

"Oh! and Mrs. Severne," said the junior Miss Fenton. "She would be *miserable* if anything happened to *you*, Mr. Severne." (This was said with an air of a complaint.)

Severne smiled over at his friend. "I think she *would* be a little distressed, Miss Fenton. But I do hope they will come to-night. Everyone in the house will like them, I know; and as for the daughter, Miss Palmer, every man here will be in love before morning."

Miss Fenton's ears seemed to quiver uneasily, as a dog's would at the sound of an approaching step.

"Oh! indeed," she said, drily, "a beauty coming here! This is a surprise. So the *regular* ladies of the

house must prepare to be neglected and given up. Isn't it cruel, Mr. Canby?"

With the pitiless selfishness of ball-room friendship, that gentleman showed an anxiety about the coming lady.

"We all get our turn," he said; "one day up, another down. Tell us about her, Severne."

"You will be one of the first victims, Mr. Canby," said Miss Fenton, with some faint hope that she would be contradicted.

"Depends," he answered, carelessly; "we must see before we give in. What's your friend like, Severne?"

"Fancy," said the other, with a little eagerness, "only fancy this! a girl *almost* tall, her head *laden* with heavy black hair, her face bright and all colour——"

"All colour!" said Miss Fenton, with a "giggle" of derision, "dear me!"

"All colour," repeated Harold, gravely, "like an old picture. It is so rich and gorgeous, that it is like a feast—a bit of fruit—and taken with her wonderful eyes, large and deep, she lights up the room, and furnishes it with a feast of colour. Then she has a figure like a classic statue—quiet, yet at every movement falling into some graceful attitude. She walks like a Cleopatra. It seemed to me, as I lay on the sofa in their house, even her dress made no rustle as she walked. Her touch was like velvet. She is my Paul Veronese, and until I saw her I did not believe that human colouring could come so near to the gorgeous colours of the brush. But you'll see her to-morrow, and be dazzled for yourselves."

"What a description!" said Miss Fenton. "What shall we do when this paragon comes? Has Mrs. Severne seen her?" she added, maliciously; for she had noticed that his mother, looking down, had caught some words of his rapturous declaration.

Of young Severne, both the Fentons knew they could have no reasonable hopes, and so could only look on him "as a brother."

"No," he said, quietly, "she has not. She was ill herself at the time, and she never knew anything until I was

well. You will see her embrace her though for all that, and treat her *like a daughter*."

Again Miss Fenton simpered and "giggled."

"Like a daughter?" she said; "how funny!"

"It is funny," said Harold, laughing. "I beg pardon for being so old-fashioned. I am a poor young lad from Oxford, and the old childish simplicities are only partially knocked out of me. But never mind, my dear Miss Isabella; what does that fogie Shakspeare say about "making the body rich?" Mental qualifications will hardly do to set up a girl in life. But he spoke according to his lights. But now I give all the ladies here due notice, when she comes they will find it hard to hold their own. A wonderful girl, I can tell you. Not disputatious, you know, which is odious in a woman, but a quiet weight of manner, which will astonish you. I think it fair," he added, laughing, "to put you all on your guard. She will be a social queen here."

"And will you be her minister—he! he! Mr. Severne?" simpered Miss Fenton, her mouth tightening a little with vexation.

"No," he said, seriously. "I fear she will not do that. The minister must be at least equal to his queen. That post, Miss Fenton, is reserved for a cunning man—a genius, perhaps—a man that has seen the world, and knows it off by heart like his prayers; like Canby. Eh, Canby?"

That gentleman accepted the compliment in good faith. "No, 'pon my word—ah, you are joking," he said. "I shouldn't object though. Like to be councillor to any pretty girl, you know. Your description has made me rather curious." Here was social heartlessness again—signs of hollow infidelity, and Miss Fenton's lips tightened yet more.

Thus the dinner went on. Often Sir John came back to his hopeless despairing of the Republic, and through the pleasant clatter of voices was heard a snatch of his desponding vaticination.

"I'll soon have to be looking out for a decent corner

to live in. As for old England, I give her up. I'm getting choked with your infernal cotton-spinners. Why, there's Austria bound neck, hand, foot, and crop, and everything, to 'Row-home.' You can't wink there, without leave from a parson. But you must respect them, Ma'am. They're gentlemen all the time. The nobles keep up. The scum is kept well in its place. You don't catch them shakin' hands with a low soap-boiler, or sitting down to dinner with a feller that has made the stuff in the very shirt on your back. You don't—Hallo! what's Harold at now?"

A servant had been whispering to Severne for some moments, and that young man had jumped up eagerly, and was hurrying to Sir John.

"My dear guardian," he said, "here's a business! Jordan's come up with news that there's been an accident on the line down near Gorse Point, four miles from the station. I hope to Heaven it's not the down train;—the Palmers, you know——"

"I shouldn't be surprised. Since these infernal screaming nuisances have come cutting through the place, anything may happen."

"But we must send help, guardian, and at once," said the young man, hastily; "there may be people killed, or dying, or hurt. I shall go myself in the waggonette, and—and bring some of the men."

"Do Harry," said Sir John, earnestly. "See Filby the steward, he'll give you everything; you had better take a crowbar or two and a hammer."

"Leave it to me, Sir John," said the young man, going; "we shall be there in a quarter of an hour. Get out the waggonette, d'ye hear, and Nelly the trotting mare; and look sharp, Duncan."

"She is coming round, Sir," said Duncan, quietly; "I thought you'd be going down."

"Sensible fellow, Duncan; I am obliged to you; that was very thoughtful, Duncan."

"And perhaps, Sir," said Duncan, in the same quiet way, "the Doctor, Sir——"

"Ah, very good, too—more thoughtful still, Duncan."

Doctor, you must leave your wine, and sit in the back seat. Nelly can take a dozen of us and find no difference. There is sure to be a job of some sort for you. There—is there anything else anyone can think of?”

There was a little flutter of excitement and curiosity in the party that remained behind; but it soon subsided, Mr. Canby prophesying that it would all turn out “a bottle of smoke.” Captain Philips shrugged his shoulders, and holding his full glass between him and the light, asked his neighbour, in an utterly unimpassioned way, what they were all fussing about?” When he was told—

“Oh, one of those smashes,” he said; “a goods train gone into a coal truck, or into some slow second-class train. Very likely a couple of old women well squeezed, and serve ’em right; why couldn’t they travel by the reg’lar express? Everything, you know, must keep out of the way of that.”

Then he dwelt on the folly of making up wild-goose chases after such things—“packing out” in a night like that, when the company had its own fellers paid, “and deucedly well paid, I can tell you,” to look after such jobs. “Well,” he went on—and in truth he was a little annoyed at the interruption to what he was saying—“Well, as I was saying, there was no better place. Capital prime beef and mutton, at eightpence a pound—for the good pieces, mind—noble fish,” &c.

The waggonette and Nelly was drawn up at the great archway. The lamps were lighted. It was a fine, clear, fresh night, with frost out. The gentlemen got up. Nelly was shaking a necklace of Norwegian bells that she wore round her handsome neck, and was impatient to get away. The music sounded melodious in the night air. Cigars were lit, and without a touch of the whip they were skimming along the iron roads like a Canadian sledge. They were in spirits even. Looking behind the red lights of the shadowy Digby glowed through the darkness. The doctor alone, with a strangely un-

professional feeling, seemed to regret the pleasant board he had left behind.

“If I could only get off my mind,” said Severne, anxiously, “that it wasn’t the down train, with the Palmers in it, I should almost enjoy the whole business.”





CHAPTER III.

THE VALLEY.

THEY had to drive several miles—further, indeed, than had been announced. The intelligent Duncan, who stood up behind, looking out as from a watch-tower, soon made out lights.

“There they are, Sir,” he said. “We must leave the mare and carriage at the next turn, and shall have to climb up the cutting, Sir.” They had to do so. They had to scramble down again, a very high hill and cutting, to get on the line, and there they found the scene of the accident.

No time had been lost. They had met a stray passenger or two hopelessly trying to scale the sides of a gorge, filled with terror and confusion. Below they saw the red light of the engine, which was blowing and dripping steam and vapour like a dying steeple-chaser. Lights, lanterns, were dancing about spasmodically below, and to the gentlemen now hastily descending, that little amphitheatre—at perhaps the loneliest part of the line—seemed to be crowded with dark figures, and heavy buildings as dark—which were the carriages. Confused voices and murmuring rose up and met their ears as they came down.

After all it was not a very serious accident. It was after the usual formula—a long, long luggage train, winding and bending round the curves like an enormous snake, to whom life—and the lives of all that have to do with it—was a burden, had to skulk and creep along the

roads like an escaped felon—haunted by the fear of pursuing express trains. And one unlucky one half overtaken—panting to get forward, for the bare life, had at last been run down by the fiery racer that had so long been at its heels. It was not a *very* violent collision; one first-class carriage had been shattered, the passengers sadly shaken, and some hurt. But the unhappy coal waggons were “smashed” into firewood, twisted, chopped, bent into a shape that no known human process could purposely reduce them to.

The young men were welcomed like saviours. Agitated women came fluttering round them begging aid. *They* were the first signs of human assistance. The local doctor put them all aside. “Come, now,” he said, “who is hurt? Show me the way. Where are they? Any serious fractures—limbs to be set, eh?” The guards came running to him. “You a doctor, Sir?” they said. “Then come this way. There is a gentleman here, and a lady, and a child——” and the doctor, much relieved in his mind—for all the way he had thought that “a job” would be the only thing that would compensate for the pleasant joys he had left behind—bustled away after them with much alacrity.

The two young men did all they could to reassure the others. There were very few passengers, at least of the first class. There were some commercial gentlemen who were very noisy and troublesome on their wrongs.

“Always this way,” said one; “as sure as my name is Coxe, I’ll have my action-at-law. This is the third time this infernal company has served me in this way. I was due to-morrow at Stamford by six thirty, A.M. Confound ’em, I’ll have damages for this, or my name’s not Coxe.” But this gentleman was quietly and promptly rebuked by Mr. Selby, who told him to “hold that noise, and that it was a shame for him not to be grateful for standing there in a whole skin, and no broken bones—instead of grumbling, as he did.” This blunt correction tranquillised him at once.

Young Severne was a true Samaritan—so friendly—so useful—so kindly in tranquillising fears. He was much

relieved when he had found that those whom he had expected were not in the train. Another train was due in about half an hour, and a man had been sent down the line with a lantern to stop it. It would take on all the present passengers.

A bright lady—as well as he made out—in a velvet hat, and seal-skin cloak, had passed Severne two or three times wringing her hands. He went after her. “You are looking for something?” he said. “You are not hurt, I hope?” Severne was in a rough Irish frieze coat. In the darkness she took him for a sort of countryman.

“Oh,” she said, “what shall I do? there, it is gone! Some one has stolen it—do stir and try and find it for me.”

“What?” said he.

“Oh, my dressing-case, my little dressing-case, with everything I have in the world in it—jewels, everything. I would not lose it for *any* money. Please try, exert yourself and find it.”

“Oh, is that all?” said he. “No doubt it is quite safe; but, Ma’am, there are other things to be considered first—human life and human sufferings before dressing-cases.”

“Oh, of course, of course, Sir,” she said, plaintively, now seeing that he was no countryman, “quite right, indeed. My head seems to go round; I don’t know what I am saying or doing, and my husband—you have not seen him, Sir?—Where is he? Do tell me, quick. I am sure he is hurt.”

Severne was about to laugh but checked himself.

“We must try and find him for you,” he said.

“Find him—find him then, quickly,” she said. “Oh, where is he? Lead me to him!”

“Come,” said Severne, “this way then.” He saw the Doctor at the end of the bank, with a lantern beside him, bending over some one.

“Ah, there he is,” said the lady in an agony of grief, and cast herself down on the ground beside the figure.

It was a tall gentleman, with eyes closed, and a grizzled grey beard and hair. He seemed half insensible, and now and again gave a groan.

"There is something damaged internally," said the doctor to Severne. "I can't make it out here; no conveniences you know. No arm or leg broken, however. Now, my *good* Madam, please. You can give no assistance with *that* sort of thing—so please."

"I say—a dressing-case has been found," Selby said. "The guard has got it. So you need have no anxiety."

The lady did not hear this speech. "What are we to do?" she said, as if to herself, "he will not speak to me. He does not know me."

"He is coming round," said the Doctor. "Give him a little time, you know. Something about the ribs, I suspect. Often happens in these cases."

"But there is nothing serious?" the lady said, now down on her knees in an agony of suspense. "He is not hurt? He will recover?"

Selby came up again at this moment. "Here," he said, "I have got it. Here, Ma'am, is your dressing-case, quite safe."

Severne, fond of a little sarcasm at all inappropriate times, even, said, "*It is not hurt; it will recover.*"

"What is to be done, though," said Selby, hastily, "with this poor gentleman? Where can he be taken to? We can't have him lying here."

"There's no house nearer than the 'all, Sir," said Duncan, touching his hat.

"Look here, Harry," said Selby, taking him by the arm, "just a word. I think you must offer these people some shelter. The poor man is seriously damaged, I can see—too much so to go on by the next train; and I think Sir John would not——"

"I am afraid he would," said Severne, a little shortly. "You see, there are the women—perhaps maids, friends, and what not. It's exactly the thing that he *would* object to."

"Good gracious, Harry!" answered the other warmly, "and so you mean to say you would let a poor soul lie in the snow there—die in the snow, perhaps—all because——"

"You old enthusiast," said Severne, laughing, "how

you take up things ; no one is going to die. Well, you must have everything your own way." He turned round, and went back to the group. The gentleman was half sitting up—his eyes were open. "I think," said Severne, "it would be better if he was taken away out of this." (At this moment the sound of Nelly's bells came faintly through the frosty air.) "We have a carriage waiting that will take us home in ten minutes, and if this gentleman, and this lady—your husband, I presume——" He looked at her interrogatively.

"Yes, yes," she said, eagerly. "Of course ; but he will recover. I know he will—see, he opens his eyes."

"Then I suppose it would be the best course?" he said, still coldly, and turning to the doctor.

"Well," said that gentleman, "I would recommend it, as there is no other place near."

"Very well," said Severne, shortly, "let us lose no time then. We can carry him up readily. Perhaps this lady—perhaps you would explain to him—he seems conscious now."

The lady went down on her knees again in the snow. "Dearest," she said, her face close to his, "how are you now? Would you like to be moved to the house and shelter this good gentleman so kindly offers?"

As his full eyes met hers, they dropped, and he did not answer.

"Do you hear that?" said Severne, starting. "There it is at last !"

Far off through the night came a succession of short screams and interrogative whistlings. This was the coming train snorting indignantly, expostulating at being obliged to stop short, and demanding explanation. Lanterns were seen waving and fluttering violently far away, as if blown by the wind ; and the glowing, crimson light of the engine came gliding on, and at last stopped short in a white cloud of its own steam.

The commercial gentleman, still indignant, said it was all fine enough—and it was well they weren't run into again ; it was no fault of the company if they weren't. But the point was, where would he be by six-thirty to-

morrow morning? Others of the passengers, still much fluttered by their escape, shrank away from exposing themselves to this second risk after such an escape; and some ladies and children were crying. But the guards came up with their old business-like cry, "Now, then, take your seats, please!" and it seemed better to be taken away at all risks, than left in a defile like that. Besides, as the commercial gentleman remarked, "They'd hardly do the thing over again—at least on *that* night; though he wouldn't put it past em, mind." Finally they were all got in—to the surly expostulation of the newly-arrived passengers who were much crowded in consequence—and who also hinted at some sort of punishment to be inflicted on the company—the programme of which was arranged between them and the commercial gentleman all the way up to town.

The cutting was now deserted. Hodge and a friend or two, who had come up too late for profit, were gaping down from the top of the hill, and could make nothing of the business. But they saw the little party coming up, the injured gentleman a little restored by this time—leaning on two gentlemen: and Hodge, as though he were a stage rustic, said to his friend, "Eh, laws! but that be young Squire."

"And young Squire's friend," added the companion, "he wi' the lang legs!"

"Squire's friend" was helping up a lady. Indeed the sides of the cutting were as steep as a hill, and it was very hard work. Nelly was still shaking her bells, having lost all patience, and with head turned round, was taking a wicked and suspicious side-look at the increased party. Young Severne was in command, as it were, and issued orders authoritatively.

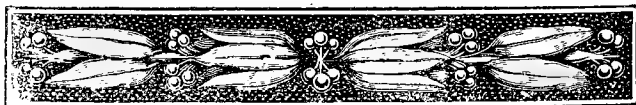
"Carefully now," he said; "some one must sit on each side of him. Duncan, you must get back as you can, or stand on the steps, if you like. Selby, you and this lady go inside, and, doctor, you with me on the box. How do you feel now, Sir?"

The iron-grey head—it was a little stooped between the shoulders—gave a sort of courteous bow. "A little

better," he said, faintly. "Only something here," he said, putting his hand on his chest. His wife was looking from side to side, with a sort of glance of half despair. "Oh, you *are* better," she said. "Tell me so."

"Your dressing-case is *quite* safe," said Severne, with the reins now in his hand. "I saw it put in myself. All right behind there? Go, Nelly." And immediately the bells began to jangle, and the wheels to "thrum" monotonously along the white frost-bound roads, furnishing to the bell music what seemed to be the drone of a bagpipe.





CHAPTER IV

THE NEW ARRIVALS.

IT was past ten o'clock when they came cantering up towards the glowing red lights of Digby. Severne on his box heard the lady behind him murmuring her astonishment and wonder at the pile of building now approaching. She was literally confounded—as, indeed, were many tourists who saw it for the first time—at its grandeur and imposing character.

They all got down ; the servants came out. Behind them was the long figure of Sir John, who from the drawing-room had heard Nelly's bells.

Severne ran to meet him with a hasty whisper. "All right, quite right," said Sir John ; "where are they?"

Then he went forward to meet them with a warm hospitality.

"So sorry," he said. "Hope, Sir, you are not hurt seriously? These new-fangled railways will kill us all one day. And you, Madam, very glad to see you, too."

"Oh, Sir," said the lady, humbly, "your goodness overpowers us quite."

"You are most kind," said the gentleman, still in evident pain. "But I am afraid I am hurt seriously."

"Look here, Harry," said Sir John, "we can put them in the Palmers' room for to-night—fires burning and all ready. Just the thing. Lean on me, Sir. There. We'll take care of you and make you snug. And, Doctor, you may as well come too."

Then this hospitable old gentleman bestowed his new guests, and presently the gentleman was laid in bed, in the snuggest apartment in the world, and the Doctor was busy making what he called an "official examination."

"Just what I suspected," he said—"coming home in the carriage: a rib gone—touching the lung. Can be raised very favourably though. Do it at once—judicious bandaging and splints."

The faithful wife alone was present, waiting eagerly for this verdict. She gave a half-scream.

"There's no danger, Ma'am," said the Doctor, roughly; "more inconvenience than danger. Take my advice, and go down to the ladies. Get them to give you a glass of Sir John's old particular green wax. Say I ordered it, if you like. These things give an imperceptible shock, you know."

"Do," said the husband, faintly, "go down, please." She yielded. She glided lightly into the room that had been laid out for Mrs. Palmer, took off her bonnet, smoothed her hair, bathed her face hastily, gave some hasty touches to her dress here and there, re-tied a ribbon or two, and choosing a flower out of a bouquet fresh pulled, that was on the table, contrived somehow to work it into her system. Then she backed a little before the glass, advanced, retreated, and advanced again—touching and retouching. She was at last satisfied, and went down.

That room was in one of the towers. At the bottom of the stair, which wound a little, there came a long oak corridor, with many doors. It was natural that a mere stranger should be bewildered; and Selby, who had run to his room to fetch something to amuse the ladies, and was scampering back, singing and whistling like a school-boy, came suddenly upon the new lady, helpless in the windings of a strange house.

"My goodness," he said, a little confused. "Of course, we should have thought of this, and sent some one. I am very sorry—it was so stupid of me."

"Stupid! no," said the lady. "But I am so glad I met *you*. It is all so awkward—so wretchedly awkward

entering, meeting a crowd of strange faces in this painful way. I dread it. I shrink from it. What *shall* I do?"

"Don't mind," he said, hastily; "you are a guest, you know. Why, they are all so glad. I am sure they are."

"A guest! No," she said, sadly. "We have no business to be here. We are intruders on your delightful party. I at this moment," and she stopped undecidedly, "ought to be at his bed-side. Naturally it looks unfeeling. Indeed I ought to go back. You must let me."

It then occurred to Selby that he ought *not* to let her go back.

"You must not go," he said, with gentle firmness. "The Doctor will look to everything. Women, you know, are always in the way. I mean—confound it! no, I mean, in that sort of place. Come in with me; we can go in together. This is the way."

The door was only a short way off; they heard the merry voices, the more cheerful and polite din, the ringing of ladies' laughter. She held back a moment, with her hand pressing her waist.

"How *can* I face them all," she said, "and he lying there?"

Selby opened the door, and said, gently -

"Courage!"

There was a huge fire-place, like a great archway, where a log fire was burning noisily. The company was gathered round it, the ladies seated, the gentlemen flitting about among them, and the tall, gaunt Sir John standing up in the centre, like a colossal statue. The Dean, in one of the tall-backed arm-chairs, lay placidly with his hands before him, and in the full and encouraging blaze, which lit up his face like a glory, and, at the same time, induced a perceptible drowsiness, while the Baronet, standing up over him, still dwelt on the "awful" signs of the times. Mrs. Severne, always tranquil and "sweet," was busy with some work. But the two Fentons, untiring and untired, whether it was the work or play of life, as fresh now as they were at breakfast time, as eager now

to work out their earthly salvation as at the inspiring hours of morning, still sent forth the merry peal of appreciation, and by an amazing assiduity were actually making some impression on that worldly and selfish Canby, who was their idol.

"Oh tell—tell that again, Mr. Canby," said Isabella: "indeed you shall, and you must! I never heard *anything* so funny; and Mrs. Severne, too, must come over and hear it. The best thing you *ever* heard in your life, Mrs. Severne! You *must* come over!"

That lady rose at once, for the engaging young girl had gamboled over to her side.

"I must not lose an opportunity that may never occur again," said Mrs. Severne to her neighbour, without any malice, "of hearing the best thing I may ever hear!"

"Oh! I declare, 'pon my word," said Mr. Canby, in some confusion at this publicity, "it aint fair."

At this moment the lady entered.

Sir John stalked forward good-naturedly to meet her. "I hear everything is going on well," he said. "You must sit down here, and warm yourself, and make yourself quite at home; we shall have supper very soon now."

There was a general disarrangement and movement. All faces were turned towards that one face. It looked very different now from what it had done down at the "cutting," in the shadow or under the lantern-light. It was a round, brilliant, full, and well-coloured face; with good hair, fine eyes, and a sort of delicate *embonpoint* about the figure. "In a vulgar creature, my dear" (looking at her, from an old-lady point of view)—these would have been the elements for brazen effrontery; but she had such an air of modesty and retirement that they became a fresh charm. The Fentons, interrupted at a critical moment when they had their sickles in the corn, as it were, looked at her with the instinct of hostility—and the Dean, bestirring himself with a sort of shiver, for he had been wakened from a sweet dream, in which he had the good Lord Buryshaft's hand upon his cuff, and the good lord's voice in his ear, "My dear Burnaby, Loughborough is

failing every day, and when Chester is vacant——” saw the new arrival, very indistinctly. Mr. Canby had his glass in his eye, for the new lady's attractions were of the effective music-hall pattern—only refined—and half rose to get nearer.

The lady was presently seated among them, and rather astonished Severne and his friend by her quiet composure. She was soon telling the whole story of her sufferings, in a very low voice, and, certainly, without any sensational heightening. “We were coming home from the Continent,” she said, “and the passage had been exquisite, not a ripple on the water. Everyone was so happy! I sat on the deck, and saw that gay, lively Boulogne grow indistinct in the distance. One always feels regret at leaving a place where one has had such happy, happy days.”

(Everyone present accepted this as a truth, which had an air of novelty from the plaintive tone with which it was spoken; though, indeed, it would seem an obvious truism enough.)

“I beg your pardon,” said Severne, eagerly. “So you came from Boulogne by to-day's packet?”

“Yes,” said the lady, gently; “I think so.”

“Dear me,” said Severne, eagerly. “Then you may have met them—the Palmers. Did you remark a lady and her daughter—a very striking looking girl—‘tallish,’ brilliant colour?”

“What! with a sort of widow lady?”

“Exactly; rather French.”

“A vision—a vision!” said the lady, with an enthusiasm that became quite dazzling. “I never saw such a magnificent creature. She sat on the deck the whole time. A feast to the eye—indeed she was. I never saw anyone to compare to her. Even my husband, who from his affection has his own foolish standard—even he—ah, but I little thought then what was in store for us!”

There was a silence of respect for a moment. Even the Dean, though the glow of the fire was wooing him back to sweet dreams again, was listening, and at the first convenient opening, had a parallel passage ready from

his own life ; as when Lord Edward Somersault came over with him in the Calais packet—let him see—in the disastrous year '29—the year when the landmarks of the Constitution were “swept away——”

“And you spoke to them?” said Severne, eagerly ; “you sat near them?”

“Oh dear, yes,” said the lady ; “charming people they were.”

“I am so glad of this,” said Severne. “It turns out quite fortunate. They will be here to-morrow. You will renew your acquaintance.”

The lady gave a little start : “Acquaintance,” she said, sorrowfully. “Oh no, no ! they will not recollect *that*. We know what a packet-acquaintance is—faces pass by, and we forget, and never see them again. No : there was a French gentleman who was very, very kind to the young girl. So devoted, and kind, and considerate—not at all like a Frenchman.”

“Infernal monkeys,” said Sir John. “An Englishman would thrash a room full. Eat them up, as dog Toby did the rats.”

But Severne was a little uneasy, and said no more. The sisters Fenton looked at each other with a little enjoyment ; but Canby was evidently interested. “Most curious,” he said ; “and so you were all on board the packet?”

The lady turned to him gratefully as if this help had made her statement more lucid.

“Yes, we were in the packet. Then came the railway—the carriage—the *dreadful carriage*”—and she shut out the view with her hands.

“’Spress, of course,” said Mr. Canby, encouraged by his success.

“Oh, yes,” said she, grateful for the correction ; “you are quite right. It *was* the express. We came on—up through the charming English country—the grand fields lying out under the sun—the grand English oaks—some way,” she added, with a sort of *naïveté* ; “it looked so bright and sound and flourishing *after the French* country.”

"Ah, ha ! Ma'am," broke in Sir John ; "very good of you ! Old England for ever still ; you can't compare 'em ; their mean, mangy patches, at which they go fiddling, fiddling with bodkins — wretched scrubby things !"

"It was such a bright, encouraging day," went on the lady ; "and we all felt so happy at getting home again ; and then it began to grow dark, and he—my dear husband—was talking fondly of our expected fireside, the hearth swept up—our *own* home, never *yet* seen, for we have been married but a short time——"

Gradually a perfect silence had been established, and everyone, even the reluctant Fentons, had been drawn in to listen to this natural history. It was impossible not to be interested. Mr. Monkhouse and Captain Philips, the two Epicureans of the house, coming in with good spirits from the billiard-room, were awed into decorum by reproachful glances.

"We were talking," went on the lady, "of what days of happiness were before us—what quiet joys and innocent pleasures. He had said to me in his kind way, 'You must enjoy yourself ; see what there is of life—for my sake. I have long ceased to care for things of that kind.' But what am I talking of?" And in great confusion she stopped. Severne smiled.

"By the way," he said—"excuse me for interrupting you—you got the dressing-case safe ? Selby had charge of it, you know."

"It was taken to the room," she said, hastily ; "and I am so much obliged to Mr. Selby for the trouble he took, and to you, too."

"Oh ! not at all," said Severne, "we all saw that you were so exceedingly anxious about it."

"*Indeed* I was," she said, with her eyes on the oaken floor ; "it contained two little pictures that I would not have lost for the world, and some letters—some dear letters——"

"And jewels, I think you said ?"

"Harold," said Sir John, a little gruffly ; "see and push on supper, will you ? we are all getting hungry."

Well, you were talking, you say, Ma'am, about old England?"

"Oh, yes," she said; "and we had just caught a glimpse of red lights glittering afar off. Oh, it *must* have been *this* house."

"Was it where there was a break in the hills, near the pond?" asked Sir John, eagerly.

"Yes, yes," she said, eagerly; "a pond—there was—exactly."

"I knew it," said Sir John; "it's the best view of the place; you shall see it in the morning. I made that myself thirty-five years ago; and these rascals came with their infernal line and cut it all up."

"The very place," said the lady. "How strange that you should know! Then, as we were speaking, came a crash,—and oh!" She covered up her face. There was a silence. The two Fenton girls looked at each other, and rustled their dresses with impatience. One tried to catch Mr. Canby's eye, but that gentleman was absorbed by the new Scherazade, and the labours of a hard day—the ascent up the tower, &c.—had all been spent in vain.

"Don't think of it," said Sir John. "It will all come right again. We'll make him well; only I hope in God," said the Baronet, with infinite energy, "you'll have your action against 'em. I'll speak to him to-morrow."

"Lord Campbell's Act——" said the Barrister, who practised at country houses; "quite sure to get damages; jury always find against the company."

"Glad to hear it," growled Sir John; "hope they'll salt 'em. Look at these pictures, Ma'am," he went on, lighting a candle. "No mushrooms here; every one of 'em true blue, and gentlemen to the backbone; no cotton-spinners on my walls, Ma'am; look at that—and that—you won't find a Digby here, Ma'am, that soiled his finger with infernal ledgers and figures,—no, no."

The lady was charmed with these fine old portraits, and every fresh one to which she was introduced brought

new surprise. They had, indeed, all the grim wooden look of regular ancestry—with a polite scowl, and stony contempt—seeming also too heavily encumbered with fine clothes to do any work.

“’Pon my word, you *had* a narrow escape,” said Sir John, as they went down the room a little. “Look at that, now. Bishop Digby. That’s ‘Digby’s Short Method with Dissenters’ in his hand. I’ll show it you in the library—the finest work ever written. He kept your mean, unmannerly, pot-house Dissenters in their places. None of your fiddle faddle complaints and scrape me, scrape you, ideas. They were not gentlemen, Ma’am,” said Sir John, angrily, as if *she* had said they were, “and he didn’t want to know ’em, or see ’em, or be conscious of their existence.”

“Oh ! It is dreadful,” the lady said, reflectively.

“It is, and was, Ma’am,” said Sir John ; “you are perfectly right, and, I tell you what, we have not seen the end of it yet. By-the-way,” he added, changing his tone, “what’s ’er name, Ma’am ? They told me below ; but I have the worst head for names.”

“Lepell,” said the lady, softly ; “Mr. and Mrs. Lepell.”

“Lepell !” said he, almost joyfully ; “no—very good, very good indeed. There’s the true ring in that, Ma’am. There’s Lepells in Yorkshire, and I knew a Lepell in Warwickshire—a real gentleman, was in the House with me, and walked into the lobby with me against Peel’s *infamous* measure of ’29.”

The lady started—something like delight came into her eyes. “Why that was *his* cousin, Sir, a noble-hearted man. I have often heard him speak of him.”

“My dear Madam, I am so glad,” he said, in real enjoyment : “let me welcome you to Digby. I hope you will stay with us some time. He’s dead, I know, poor Jack Lepell. Between you and me he took that vile selling the pass of Peel’s to heart ; a low swindle, Ma’am, and served us all right for sitting down to table with a fellow of *that* kind. You know the reeking kind of effluvia in those cotton places. It makes me sick.

Faugh! And now, who has the place after Jack—your husband?”

“No,” said she, softly, as if this were a trial too; “the Colonel: he is out in India; they say has embarrassed the property.”

“Ah! that was poor Jack’s doing—a true gentleman, above your low accounts and ledgerings! and so they swindled him? And you, my dear Madam? Forgive me if I am inquisitive.”

“I was Miss Bell—Jenny Bell,” she said, as it were, in terror; “of a good family, too, Sir—indeed, yes, but not rich.”

“What harm in that?” said Sir John; “nothing to be ashamed of. Some cotton blackguard, I dare say, has been too much for them, eh?”

“Oh! Sir,” said Mrs. Lepell, starting, “how did you know—who told——”

“It’s the old story, my dear,” he said; “I hear of these things. Bell is a good name—egad, now that I think of it, the Bishop there married some Bell or other. I’ll look it out. By-the-way, ask me to show you his book to-morrow—as fine a work as ever you read.”

They were still opposite the Bishop, a grim prelate—with an enormous wig that seemed like two down pillows, with huge white sleeves, that seemed like two more, with his right hand resting on a great quarto, sloped at an angle: just as the General, a short way down, had *his* bâton sloped at an angle. This massive volume was labelled “Short Method,” &c.

Sir John put out his candle and led her back to the company. “My dear Madam, here’s a discovery. Our friend up stairs is cousin to an old friend. This is Mrs. Lepell; no one knew Jack Lepell better than I did. I am so glad. Let me introduce to you his cousin’s wife.”

Mrs. Severne got up with alacrity, and with a beaming face. “I am so glad,” she said, taking her hand, “it has turned out in this way.”

(Mrs. Severne always did the right thing, and with true

breeding would be almost rustic in her welcome, when an occasion required.)

"Jack Lepell was one of the old Guard—a true man, until Peel and his gang broke his heart, I do believe. Mrs. Lepell here knows it well. By Jove, I must go up and see Lepell and talk to him."

"He's asleep, Sir John," said Severne, "and supper's coming up."

"That's not at all a bad notion," said Captain Philips, brightening up, "I was just thinking of something hot and comfortable. We're all getting so proper and decent, people'll be ashamed to be seen eating a cutlet by-and-by."

"Not in this house, Sir," said Sir John, "nor to sit down to it either."

"Ah! that's a *very* good notion, too," said the officer, coolly. "One gets hungry so soon in these airy houses. Then to be huddled in to a sideboard, to pick a bit here and a bit there——"

"Ah! that's the new school," said Sir John. "Ah there it is at last. Take my arm, Mrs. Lepell. I am very *glad* to have you here. I am indeed. You must be hungry; and if you don't take your glass of Burgundy, and two wings of the roast wild duck, we shall quarrel, I warn you——"

"You are so kind, Sir John," she said, "I almost feel getting into spirits again—which I ought not to do."

They passed out of the drawing-room into a "snug" little octagon room, where there was a fire and a round table. It was reached by no draughty passages, infinitely to the satisfaction of Captain Philips, who had not to put up his coat collar. "Our friend has his sensible points; and really I don't object to this bit of Old Times. Something very savoury," added the captain, sniffing, "seems like game—eh, Monkhouse? There'll not be room for us. Come quick to the side-table—out of the way, you see, and room for your arms; and I am sick of talking to the women—and we'll get a bird or so, quietly, over for ourselves." And there was pre-

sently a cheerful and noisy party about the large round table ; and precisely as he had arranged, Captain Philips, with apparent self-sacrifice, was bestowed at the side-table, where he received greater attention than anyone in the room.





CHAPTER V

“LORD JOHN.”

AGAIN a pleasant scene had set in ; this was what *he* called cosy, Sir John said, and he was fairly right, if there was “cosiness” in a warm room with a sharp frost outside, and light, and cheerful faces, and an unfashionable appetite. “I can tell you,” said Captain Philips, “this is an uncommonly good bird. They have done him not a minute too long. Here ! don’t take that away” (this was to the servant carrying off the bird), “and see, get a lemon here, will you—and the Harvey sauce, will you ?”

At this moment the door was opened softly, and a red, elderly face, much heated, was put in. The eyes of the red face were a little strained and bloodshot, but there was a gay, rollicking twinkle in the eyes. “Ah ! at work,” said the voice belonging to the face, “and uncommonly good work, too ; am I in time, ch ?”

“Come in, come in, Lord John !” said Sir John heartily ; “you *are* in time, and I am glad of it. Put down your coat in the corner there.”

Lord John came in at once, pulling off gloves and a comforter and a coat.

“I was dining with them at the barracks, and couldn’t pass the house—just for a finish. I told them below to put up the gig.”

Captain Philips had looked round with disgust the moment he saw the red face.

"Here's that drinking Lord! Close up well, can't you, or they'll be sticking him in beside us. Really, it is too bad! No room for a man's arms; always the way in these houses; can't let you eat your bit in comfort."

"Over there, Lord John," said Sir John, heartily, "next to Philips. He'll make room for you."

Lord John had gone over.

"Push up, will you?" he said, dragging in his chair. "Send that bird here, Philips; don't swallow him *all* up, you know. Wait, and I'll begin with a nip of the brandy to drive the frost out of my chest. Here, Sam, cordials down here."

Captain Philips said nothing, but with yet more marked disgust moved away.

"Just let me——" he said, retaining the bird, "before you begin; I had this breast half off before you came in."

"It is an infernal night out," said Lord John; "not sorry I took that nip now. I wanted something warm inside."

This was Lord John Raby, an elderly bachelor, who had a small box close by, where he lived a great deal, and to a far greater extent ranged the country, preying on his neighbours, and dropping in without ceremony at all hours, and with the same freedom, always asking for "something warm." He had been in a fast cavalry regiment, and was said to have done something about which hung a little mist that was disreputable. He had lived much in Paris when he was young, was full of strange stories, and had a curiously free manner.

They were very gay at the round table. Mrs. Lepell, the new guest, was now quite at home, unrestrained, and very amusing. She said she was not ashamed to own that *she was very hungry*, for they had had a very long and weary day of it.

"I am glad you are hungry—very glad," said Sir John, "and have the sense to say so. I like a woman that is not ashamed to take her food. All the fine young

girls of my day ate plenty, and got all their good looks from eating, I can tell you."

"I begin not to care what they say," said Mrs. Lepell. "We were always Conservatives in *that*, as in other points. And I always think and say, in *my little way*, that you should be *consistent*, Sir John, and carry out whatever you believe, even in small details. That is *our* creed, is it not, Sir John?"

"It is!" said he, with delight; "'pon my soul it is! No shamming and skulking for us! Be whatever you are to the very backbone."

"Yes," said Mrs. Lepell, "I would have it even in the colour of our dress, Sir John."

Mrs. Severne smiled.

"Really you are quite an ardent believer," she said.

"It is quite refreshing to meet such enthusiasm," said her son. "You put our sluggish consciences to the blush."

"Who is she, Philips?" asked Lord John; "where did he pick her up? Fine woman, I say; I like her *tournure*."

"Came to-night," said Captain Philips; "if you're quite done with that sherry wine, you know—thanks. No bread in the room," he added, getting up; "every one must learn to wait on himself in this house."

In a few moments the ladies had gone, and it was past midnight. The gentlemen had risen. "Just one snip more, Digby; want lining sadly in this frost, and then for the gig."

"Let the gig stay where she is," said Sir John, "take my advice; there's a room ready with a fire and a bed, so you may take it or not, as you like."

"Egad, then, I will," said Lord John. "You make your house too snug, Sir John. That notion of the fire did the business; quite a picture, you see, and with a cigar——"

"Here, and take the balance of that cognac. You may as well."

"Egad, then, I will," said Lord John. "'For these and all other blessings, Dean,' bless the cheerful giver,

I say. Good-night to everyone. You shouldn't have mentioned the fire, Sir John. That did the business!"

"You'd better look after his curtains," said Captain Philips. "You can tell Duncan, or some of them. He'll fuddle himself and set the place on fire. You may as well. I won't sleep comfortable unless you promise me. That beast," he said later, as he went to his room, "a greedy, guzzling, selfish sot. Took the whole of the breast of that bird, without a word. He has taken to driving over to our mess at ten and eleven at night. But I'm never at home. And as I told him plainly last week, I don't keep a club or a bar. The other fellers may do as they please. Goodness, what a ramshackle house this is!"





CHAPTER VI.

IN THE LIBRARY—"THE SHORT WAY."

NEXT morning everyone was down betimes—a point on which Sir John was a little particular—a point, too, at which Captain Philips grumbled a good deal. "It did well enough," he said, "fifty years ago; but really forcing people out of their nightgowns, with a fire just lit, and in weather like that, was rather too much," &c. Everyone was in the breakfast-room in time, excepting the Miss Fentons, and another lady; indeed Sir John strictly required attendance at a sort of ritual which he performed himself; but, as Captain Philips said, "he *supposed* he knew how to say his 'Our Father,' at least without going to school *again*; and to be tumbled out from your warm sheets at *that* hour!" &c., &c.

The Miss Fentons fluttered in when breakfast was half over in the most unconcerned way, although Sir John's eyes were upon them, and he bade them good-morning very testily.

"It's no use scolding us, Sir John," said the younger; "we do our best, you know; and if you keep us so agreeably every night, we can't help it. Why, we are not *half* of us down! Where is Mrs. Lepell?"

This was not an unskilful diversion; and at the moment Mrs. Lepell entered, very demure, and with an expression that might be composed, or sad, or sober.

"Well, Mrs. Lepell," called out Sir John, in his hearty

way, "come up near me. (You are late, but this is your first morning.) Now, how is the patient?"

"Oh, I don't know, Sir John," she answered, settling her napkin. "A very wretched night—restless and troubled. He may be better, and he says he is."

"Oh, come," said Sir John, "that looks well."

Severne was at a side-table helping some cold game.

"A wretched night, and looks better. I don't think that promises well. We had better send for the doctor."

"He *is* to be here, you know," said Mrs. Lepell, "the first thing in the morning, without losing a moment."

"Yes," said Severne, cutting up briskly, "it was the last thing I said to him."

"There's a fellow riding up the avenue now," said Captain Philips. "By-the-way, will you"—he never addressed the host as Sir John—will *you* let me get some toast done? I always like it very thin and *short*, you know; and I'd recommend you to have it that way. You see," he added, bending a piece with a sort of half-restrained disgust, "it gets soddened and damp *this* way. It is quite as little trouble for them, you know."

It was the Doctor who came in cheerily in a few minutes. Mrs. Lepell rose nervously. "*Now* we shall know," she said, in a low voice.

"Well, Watson," said Sir John, "been up?"

"Yes," said the Doctor, who walked in without notice. "Bad night, he says, pain here. But all that's natural, Sir John, after a shock of *that* kind. We want a little fillip, you know. I have no doubt he'll be all straight in a day or so."

There was great delight in Mrs. Lepell's face.

"Thank Heaven!" her neighbour heard her murmur.

"I am glad of it—very glad, to hear this," said Sir John; "poor Jack Lepell's cousin, too. I'll just step up and say good-morning to him."

Mrs. Lepell rose hastily. "We shall go together, Sir John," she said with a smile. "If you will take me—that is. I should lose my way in these *wonderful* rooms

and corridors. It bewilders me! Everything is so *vast* and *long*!"

"Then you must stay here until you learn them by heart, Ma'am," said Sir John, gallantly. "You must take me with you now, to show you the road." (It almost seemed as if it was Mrs. Lepell had proposed to go and see her husband, and that Sir John wished to go with her.)

He entered the bed-room cheerfully. "Well, how are we to-day?" he called out. "Better, I am told. Nothing but a rib gone, after all. It's happened to me over and over again—huntin', you know, and egad we'll have *you* huntin', Sir, before the week's out—that is," he added a little gravely, "if this frost *would* go."

A sad-looking, dejected, classical head lifted itself from the pillow. It had a deep iron-grey beard and moustache; the eyes were soft and melancholy; there were lines of care about the cheeks, but over all was a sweet, gentle expression, full of nature and simplicity and kindness. The age of that face was about forty-five years.

He spoke now, but with some pain. "I don't know how to thank you, Sir John, for this goodness. I only heard this morning where I was—in what good hands."

"We'll take care of you, never fear," said Sir John. "Of course you've heard Jack Lepell speak of me?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Lepell, "indeed, yes. You recollect, dear?"

Mr. Lepell put his hand to his forehead. "It seems like a dream to me that I have heard the name before, somewhere. I saw him very little."

"But you told me, dear," said Mrs. Lepell, reproachfully, "just think—you recollect——"

"Then *I* knew him well," said Sir John, "and I helped him, too, and a fine fellow he was. No matter; I tell you what, we *must* put you on your legs. We are sending in—and there is the county doctor there. Lord Bulstrode always has him—fine fellow, Bulstrode—goes up to town, literally *roaring*, Ma'am, with his gout—not

able to stiffen his back—to fight against that—that Maynooth thing!"

"Dreadful—oh, *dreadful!*" said Mrs. Lepell, in protest against that foundation.

"Yes, Ma'am, I could tell you stories about the intrigues of men that should know better. I assure you, Sir, *she* is sound; and I congratulate you, for in these days the women do mischief enough. I tell you what, Lepell—will you get up?—try, you know, it may do you good, fighting against a thing."

"I am afraid," said Mr. Lepell, trying to move.

"Yes, try, dear," said she, laying her hand on his shoulder. "As Sir John says, make an effort. I am afraid we shall be such a constraint."

But an expression of pain came into his face.

"If you could," said Sir John. "We have a party to-day, you know. No, no! it's not to be thought of. I'll send you up lots of books to amuse you. I'll take Mrs. L. to the library—fine standard collection—and *she* shall pick you out something. By the way, Fireirons sent me in by this morning his great book, 'England in the Leprosy,' a fine thing, but I haven't had time to cut the leaves as yet. Come, Ma'am."

She fluttered back a moment. "Let me put this pillow higher, dear." But the classic iron-grey head seemed to shrink away from any alteration in his position. Then they got in to the old library, whose walls were comfortably clothed with books, perhaps the warmest of all furniture, and with books whose backs were all rusted and oxydised.

"Here's 'England in the Leprosy,'" said Sir John. "We'll send it up to him at once. See here—look here, Mrs. Lepell. Pitt's Life, five volumes; Sir Robert Inglis's pamphlets, all bound together, very fine reading, I can tell you; Hume and Smollett. Here's good Constitutional reading to put into the hands of the young, not the swash and water of that low Whig, Mac—Mc—what's his name?"

Mrs. Lepell was delighted with these treasures. She looked at the first volume of Hume, his binding and his

type and paper, with an interest that was not unnatural, considering the praises bestowed on that fine master of writing. Then she recollected herself.

"Oh, Sir John, you promised last night—you know you did—that charming picture of the Bishop in your family—'The Sure Way to Heaven.'"

"I know," Sir John had said with enthusiasm, and was at the end of the room on a ladder dragging down Bishop Digby's work before he had heard Mrs. Lepell's most natural mistake as to the title of the book.

"Here it is! A great work—'The Short Way with Dissenters.' I tell you what, Ma'am, if the Bishop's plan had been followed—and it would have been, only there was a gang of schemers governing the country at the time—England would have been a different place from what it is now. Take it to your room, Ma'am, and read it (every word is worth gold in these times), and tell me what you think of it," and Sir John placed "The Short Way,"—an old calf-bound, dingy, dusty book, as yellow as the Bishop's own face in the picture—in Mrs. Lepell's willing arms. She received it with delight.

At this moment Severne and his friend Selby came in.

"Have you seen his Lordship, Sir John? No; I dare say he's not down yet."

"He was not at breakfast," said Sir John; "I must go round the farm though. Will you look after Mrs. Lepell here?"

That lady was left suddenly with the two gentlemen.

"Well, what do you *wish* to do?" said Severne; "some of us are going to skate. By-the-way, that looks an appalling volume you have got there. What is it—a Latin dictionary?"

Mrs. Lepell almost blushed as he took it from her: he looked at her with an amused look.

"What! 'The Short Way! —' Oh, Selby, look here, my friend! So you are going to read 'The Short Way.'"

Selby smiled too. She bit her lip, and coloured yet more.

"He *wished* me to read it," she said. "Of course it

would not be much in my way: perhaps I would not understand a word of it. But still, I think there would not be much harm in trying, especially as it is a little fancy of his, and he has been so kind to us——"

"Well, after all," said Selby, "where's the crime? I had to take it once; but a page was about the allowance I could manage."

"Who talks of crimes?" said Severne, with gaiety. "Heaven forbid that I should interfere between Mrs. Lepell and her 'Short Way.' Will you come down and see us skate?—at least such of us as don't tumble flat; a pretty exhibition it will be. There's a sleigh, too, with bells, if you like going down in *that*. The carpenter knocked it up yesterday, out of an old gig, I believe; but we have grand Russian furs to cover up the multitude of sins—that is, the old leather."

Mrs. Lepell shook her head sadly. "I am to be a nurse to-day. To-morrow, perhaps."

"And you have 'The Short Way' also," said Severne; "I forgot *that*. Very well; I must go and look up the skates." He went away joyously.

Selby approached her a little shyly. "Severne is *such* a rattling fellow; says whatever comes into his head. You mustn't mind him. And as for 'The Short Way'—he added, hesitating, "I suppose it *is* a good book."

They both laughed.

"*You* understand me," she said. "It is Sir John's little fancy, and I am not ashamed to humour it. It will give me a little trouble, I confess, and it is not quite so pleasant as a French novel—I mean, as a novel. But still, Mr. Selby, he was a bishop, and a good and a holy bishop, and this seems a good thick book, and with some reputation; and, surely, in all these pages there must be some sense, or something that could improve one, or be profitable. That is *my* little view, Mr. Selby." And with a heightened colour and a toss of her head she passed out of the room, carrying her tawny volume with her. Selby looked after her in a dreamy way, then went out slowly by another door.

The ice was on the two long Dutch ponds, between

which ran the avenue. They looked now as dark as ebony, and anyone coming down the avenue—Hodge, perhaps, with his team—heard the faint grinding on the ice, like the clicking and whirring of wheels. Stopping a moment, he saw some little black figures, like flies, fluttering up and down—swooping, soaring—in that most marvellous of human motions. One or two were twirling like tops, waltzing, spinning, and performing the most surprising evolutions. The clergyman's son, the doctor's brothers, a commercial traveller up from the village—for a pond is a republic, and skating the very essence of democracy—were all busy with this delightful exercise, with the feeling that Christmas-day had been but yesterday; that the holly was still fresh and green, that the great house was full, and that there were cheerful evenings to come, when the red curtains would be drawn. Fresh days, flowing days, with a sense of healthful enjoyment, born of this delightful exercise; which to some school boys, home for a week to the clergyman's house, and barely over the rudiments, getting terrific falls, and cruel injuries, and not in the least daunted, seemed almost paradise upon earth. The gentlemen found it "well enough" for an hour or two; but these lads had begun with the light, and would go on until darkness came; and, certainly, of a fresh, bracing evening, when the shadows were drawing on, and a cold, steel blueness was settling down, and a light or two was twinkling up and down in the house, the ponds stood out like a great sheet of frosted cake, the skating acquired a new charm from this time, and it seemed almost impossible to tear oneself from its fascinations.

But Severne was soon tired of it. "What shall we do now?" he said, dragging off his skates. "Good gracious! How frantic I used to be about this sort of thing at college! Let us take a gun, and take a shooting stroll, without any men, fuss, or preparation, after the rabbits."

"Or take the ladies a drive," said Selby. "We ought to make ourselves civil and useful in some way."

"Do you mean my mother, or the Miss Fentons?" said Severne, with a curious look; "you *are* getting quite

devoted. I must go and tell her. I can go shooting by myself. Hallo! what is this now?"

They heard the jingling of the Norwegian bells, and saw the improvised sleigh, covered up in the rich furs Severne had spoken of. There were two horses cantering along, and a lady and gentleman. They stopped a moment to look at the skating.

"Why, I declare, it's that woman," said Severne, "and Lord John!"





CHAPTER VII.

LORD JOHN AND MRS. LEPELL.

MRS. LEPELL went back to her husband's room, but soon returned to the library. Perhaps she had forgotten "The Short Way;" or perhaps the patient had fallen into a doze. It was a little hard to expect "a fine, fresh, young woman to be chained to a bed-side, in this fine stirring weather." This was the view of Lord John, who had lain long in bed, as was his wont—had had his "morning" very late, also his wont; and was now, as he said, all fresh and light for the day—as if the day itself was a serious Herculean labour, to be faced. He was roaming through the house trying to find some one to "have a turn at the cues" with—for he felt his hand tolerably steady now—when he came upon Mrs. Lepell in the library. He was not in the least likely to be put off his centre by such a meeting, though he had not yet spoken to her. In fact, he entered with great confidence, and said "Good-morning," with the greatest heartiness and delight. "How are you?" he said, "very glad you have come will shake us up a bit here. You saw me come in last night. Lord John, you know. Digby has sent over for my little kit; so they're going to make me stay."

Mrs. Lepell was not in the least disturbed. She met him in the same cordial fashion. "I am so glad, too," she said, smiling. "We shall be here some days, I suppose. It depends——"

"By-the-way," said Lord John, "how is himself? as they say in Ireland. Egad, I'm only down myself ten minutes. What with the sitting up last night and the other things, it's impossible to do it. Besides, why should one? I don't want to make my soul in *that* sort of way—prudence, temperance, and the rest—frankly confess it wouldn't repay, you know. Leave all that to the professionals. Shocked, eh?"

But the lady was not in the least shocked. At least she was so amused at Lord John's droll profanity, that with the best intentions to reprove her lips gave way. "I am afraid, Lord John, *you have not much reverence*. Those French men of the world are dreadful people."

"Are they?" said he, "are they now? My dear child, if you only knew the French *women* you would say they were funny people to send a poor boy over to be instructed by. Yet that's what my unnatural parents did to me."

"Now you must not, Lord John," said she. "No wicked French stories."

Lord John laughed loudly and took a chair. "Nothing you'd like better, Mrs. L. I see it in your eye; and a very fine one it is—as fine as any French one."

"Now, Lord John, you are getting bold; you will have to be scolded."

"Scold away, my dear woman." (Lord John was noted for these little familiarities, but everybody made allowance—French life, &c.) "What are you doing among these old fusty books here? This isn't the place for you, Mrs. L. You are out of keeping."

"But I like reading, Lord John; I do, indeed."

"She does, indeed!" repeated he, with great enjoyment. "Oh, listen to her! Of course she does. Likes the Fathers, I'll swear. Prefers St. Chrysostom and what's St. his name to George Sand. Maybe you'd oblige a friend with the loan of an odd volume of St. Thomas—come, only for ten minutes? Why shouldn't I make my soul as well as another man? Come, give it. I declare I see it in your pocket there."

Mrs. Lepell half rose. Perhaps she was a little alarmed at his familiarity.

Very naturally she hesitated. "I don't think I can," she said. "What would they say, Lord John? Alone with you, and no other lady. No; I cannot."

He laughed. "Uncommon good, and why should you be afraid of me now? Have they been telling you any stories? But I assure you I am not the man I was; I am not, indeed. I have turned over a new leaf, I have indeed. I am converted. You may see me with a gown on one of these days. My brother has two livings, you know, and his own regular fellow is seventy-eight, if he is a day."

This wicked lord was so diverting and in such good spirits this morning, that even with a wish to reprove, the lady could not help smiling.

"Well, come now," he said, "don't let us be squeamish; and I tell you what, they've a new horse that I chose for the Baronet, and he'll go nobly under the sleigh. Old Sir John doesn't like him, I believe; but that's not much. At this moment there isn't a judge of a horse under the roof but myself; and do you know I begin to think *you* have an eye for a bit of blood—I mean in horses. On my soul I do. By my old grandmother (who left me only an old prayer-book in her will, an old skin-flint!) I think you have. I see it in the corner of your eye! Hallo, Sir John, we are going to have out Toby under the sleigh."

"Then take Mrs. Lepell a turn round the park. The very thing, and I say—go up by the pond, where there is a good view of the house."

"All right, Sir," said his lordship, "she knows about horses, too."

"I am sure she does," said Sir John. "Every Lepell I ever met, did. Not, understand me, living in stables with grooms and jobbers, which they tell me is the fashion now; but enough to have a pretty seat in your saddle, and know a fine horse when you see one. Yes, you must go, Mrs. Lepell; take her round by the pond and the high plantation, then by Mangerton, whence you get

another capital view of the house. Then, let me see——”

“All right,” said his Lordship, winking, “leave us to ourselves. We’ll pass round by Mangerton, depend upon it.”

“But I think, Sir John,” said she, timorously, “I could hardly see beauties of nature with Lord John?—perhaps Mrs. Severne would be coming?”

“Egad, and you *have* been telling her something, Digby,” said his lordship, in convulsions of enjoyment. “But it’s a hard case now that the wild oats should be brought up against a man in this way. Tell her I’m like a child at a mother’s knee, or next door to a bishop. I am, on my soul.”

Sir John looked grave. Bishops were part of the State. “I have met many a bishop at your brother’s table,” he said; “men of real sound principle. The sleigh only holds two. So there would not be room. I want you to see this view, Ma’am, and you were so wishing it yourself last night.”

“Indeed I do,” she said eagerly, “and I am sure, by daylight——”

“By-the-way, how far have you got in the Bishop’s book, Ma’am?” said Sir John, looking down suddenly.

“I have not begun *yet*, Sir John,” said she, smiling; “I am keeping it for a quiet moment at the fire, when I shall have it all to myself—the curtains drawn—a regular *bonne bouche*, Sir John.”

“You must take care of it,” said he, a little testily. “Don’t hold it in that way, please.”

(Mrs. Lepell was supporting the “Short Way” under her arm, with her fingers absently playing among the leaves.)

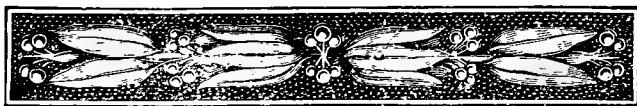
“I suppose if anything happened to this I should not know where to look for a copy. This is worth gold, Ma’am, so please take care. Well, you won’t go and see the views?”

“Nothing I should like more,” said she. “Do let us go, Lord John, I am sure I should enjoy it.”

“Well, then, let us look sharp,” said his Lordship, “or

it may be gone before we get there ; ha, ha ! I declare. O this is great, great ! ” and with much secret enjoyment he went out of the room to order the vehicle round, leaving the lady a little disquieted as to what he was alluding to as “ great, great ! ”





CHAPTER VIII.

THE DRIVE.

IN a few moments it was at the door, with Lord John, in an enormous cloak with capes (which he may have borrowed from the coachman, or had made for himself on the coachman model), busy examining the legs of the new horse, Toby. Sir John came out with them.

"You can't patch him up into a gentleman," said he; "he's a low horse, low in cut and blood."

"You are out, Sir John," said the other; "I know a horse as well as my own head, and this fellow is as good a beast, as you are a Conservative. Why Mrs. Lepell here gives it against you."

That lady started.

"Indeed I do not," she said, warmly.

"But you did, you know, up in the library there. Come, jump in and make yourself snug. I tell you what, Sir John, Toby's been badly driven by some Radical on the box. I'll make him go. Though as for that there's not a horse born that I wouldn't make go,—or mare either. Faugh! Get up! Go away from his head—stewpid!" And with a grinding not unmusical, the sleigh started off very smoothly, and Toby in particular more than bore out his purchaser's warrant.

"There! what did I say?" said his Lordship. "That old Tory thinks he knows wine and horses, and he's as ignorant as an owl. And politics, too. It makes me

sick to hear him talk ! He's damaging the party, he is, with those old saws and screws. Upon my soul I believe he'd put us into wigs and steel chokers to-morrow. How would you like me, Mrs. L., in a wig or a steel collar ? Speak out, my dear lady, you know we're in confidence here. Let me tuck this rug about you, and we can both be snug together !"

But he was mistaken if he fancied they were both to be snug together.

"I am not cold," she said, with a voice that was a little decided ; "nor am I Lord John's dear lady. You must call me Mrs. Lepell, Lord John, in future, if you wish us to be good friends."

Lord John burst into a roar, and gave Toby a sudden "cut" that made him fling his heels well up. "Oh Lord ! this is great, great !"

"In fact, I must lecture you a little," she said, in the same grave tone ; "as I say, to prevent us coming to a quarrel later. In the first place, what *is* great ? Though I think I know what you mean."

"Bet you a sovereign you don't," said his lordship, again cutting at Toby, who really did not deserve such persecution, and resented it as before.

"I suspect," said she, "you mean some reference to my sincerity—that I am acting a part. You are amused at the notion, and laugh in my face. Not very respectful to poor me, Lord John."

"What an odd woman you are !" said Lord John. "On my soul I never met your match, and I have met lots."

"There again, Lord John," she said ; "'woman,' you know, to a lady whom you have spoken to for the first time to-day. I am afraid you must think not very complimentarily of me, or else *I* must think——" She stopped.

"Not very complimentarily of me, eh ? Go ahead ; don't be afraid. You won't catch me blushing. Look at that virgin cheek ! Why, my dear gir— Mrs. Lepell, I mean (I was near stumbling then)—I have had too much of that sort of thing to mind, and if I chose at this

moment I could astonish you—I could. There was a woman I once knew in Paris — —”

“I don’t want to hear about her,” said Mrs. Lepell, with a half comic air of reproof. You are incorrigible, Lord John, I fear, and will die impenitent.”

“It’s uncommonly likely,” said his lordship, gravely. “I suppose they’ll put on the parsons, you know. I say, what did I say about Toby? Isn’t he going nobly? And to think of the old Baronet talking about gentlemanly horses. I say, that was very good about the old Bishop’s book. Why didn’t you take it out in the sleigh with you?”

They were coming to the skaters. The gentlemen were just leaving the pond when the sleigh came up.

“We can take *this* turn if you like,” he said, “if you don’t wish to face them. It’ll be half-a-mile round.”

“Not wish to face them! Why should we do that?” she answered, in wonder. “What do you mean I am to be afraid of, Lord John?”

“Confound it,” he said, a little impatiently (and again lashing Toby). “You must be wonderfully simple, or just out of school, or brought up in a convent. You don’t take a hint; but must have everything explained to you in black and white. Are you a shepherdess, eh? ‘Phyllis is my only joy! Rum ti-ti, rum ti-ti.’ Well, well! After all, one sees droll things every day, if one only keeps his eyes open. Of course I mean that tumbling on his nose there. Thus you go smash, stupid, and crack your nose! You’re not the first.”

Mrs. Lepell’s face changed. There was a maliciousness in his face that showed he was not to be trifled with. “I am afraid you are a little unkind,” she said; “or take dislikes and have some special dislike to me.”

“No,” said he, carelessly. “But let me give you a little advice. Don’t be too cautious. Now see here. A woman of the world would have liked to have *seen the view* round there, and avoided those ponds, which are flat and poor; especially a lady who is so fond of views. Besides, that’s the way to Mangerton, as Sir John desired you.”

"Oh, then, let us go, Lord John," she cried, hastily.

"No, no, too late now!" said Lord John, decidedly.

"But then you will tell me I like 'A Short Way,' Lord John," she said, slyly, with her eyes down on the fur.

Lord John nearly choked with laughter, and with genuine laughter. "Ah, *that's* good—really good. Oh, I see we'll do! You said that uncommonly well. Ah! Mrs. Lepell, you're very smart—not a shepherdess, exactly. Very far from it. No offence, I hope?"

Mrs. Lepell looked at him a little puzzled, and with an expression of dread. "I am afraid you are vindictive," she said.

"Not I," said his lordship, again dealing severely with Toby, against whom he had conceived some sudden animosity. "I don't know what's the matter with this brute to-day. I'll make him go, though;" and he began scourging the round quarters of the horse with fresh vigour. Toby's companion was speeding along with great gravity and earnestness; but Toby himself—no "gentleman," indeed, as Sir John had said with perfect truth—he had the "low drop" in him, as he presently showed by stopping short with sudden violence, flinging his head into the air, and setting his fore feet firmly against the ground, as if to resist the efforts of some one dragging him down into the bowels of the earth. That unjust lashing of his sides was beginning to bear fruit. His lordship grew angry.

"What a brute—an ill-conditioned brute!" he said. "Did you ever see his like? I wish to Heaven I had brought a good cutting whip." (His lordship was so confident of the merits of the animal he had chosen, that he had declined to take a whip of that sort.)

Then began a struggle which alarmed the lady not a little, for the consort of the "brute" was willing to go forward, and at every stroke that fell upon him, his companion made a plunge, thinking that it was intended for her, and at each plunge Toby made a corresponding motion to keep himself in position, and set his legs more firmly to resist the powers who were striving to drag him below.

Was that an oath that Mrs. Lepell fancied she heard upon his lordship's lips? "I think I had better get out," she said, timorously. "I do, indeed."

"Do as you like, Ma'am," said he, rather excited by his struggle. "I won't be beaten by any brute, man, woman or animal. Stay where you are, I recommend you. I'll just get a stake out of the hedge here that'll make him go, I promise you. You hold these."

He jumped out and put the reins into her hands. She was alarmed, but said nothing. Lord John walked on, stamping with cold and vexation, for the hedge was but ill-stocked with suitable stakes; but there was a cottage a little way on, and he should find something that would do there. In a second Toby had looked back over his shoulder, saw that his enemy was gone, and being a "low" fellow, shabby, and with the bad plebeian "drop" in him, thought he would take advantage of a lady and escape. In another moment he had given up struggling against the underground powers, had tossed his head, flung up his heels, to the speechless consternation of the poor lady, and, with some secret understanding with his companion, had started at full speed.

The road was narrow. It was more a "green lane" than a road; about wide enough for a single cart. His lordship was about twenty yards in front. He turned and saw the sleigh coming furiously down on him. There was hardly a second to prepare or devise a plan; but still, with presence of mind, he had time to throw himself into the ditch against the hedge, and let the sleigh and its unhappy freight dash by.

(His lordship often told the story afterwards, in Paris and to Frenchmen, but always substituting a gentleman as the tenant of the sleigh: "By G—d, my presence of mind saved me. It shaved me as close as this table. Luckily I had my wits about me, or I shouldn't be telling you the story or drinking this cognac of yours, *mon cher*.")

Our poor Mrs. Lepell, what nerves could there be left to her if a fresh accident was to be in store for her every day? Her rosy cheek seemed almost ghastly to the

cottager as she flew by him, the sleigh bounding and tossing in the air as if it were of indiarubber. She did not let go the reins—not from presence of mind, poor woman, but merely because they happened to be *in* her hand. Toby, the “brute,” was as “mad as any hatter,” and was really enjoying his furious race. The cottager, looking after them, scratched his head doubtfully, and said “It wur a bad job.”

So it was, or would have been, but for a gentleman who was coming down the narrow road. He, too, had plenty of presence of mind, and would have plenty of time to get over the hedge into the field, and let the dangerous vehicle go safely by. The road here got even narrower, and when cart met cart, one had to go back, at a great inconvenience, which led to angry passions on the part of the carters. But the behaviour of the gentleman was different; he stood in the middle of the road, shouting and tossing his arms wildly, even jumping into the air—all which behaviour was meant to scare Toby. For a little behind him the road turned sharply, and here directly in front, was that pond which Mrs. Lepell was so anxious to see, as being the point from which was the very best view of the house.

Toby did not in the least heed this protest, but came on as if he were cavalry making a charge. Then the gentleman, with extraordinary dexterity, jumped aside lightly, as if *he* were a matador at a bull fight, and let Toby pass him for a second, in another second had caught Toby's bridle, but in a third had lost his footing, and was being dragged along almost on his back, hanging to Toby's rein. The screams of the lady were now piteous, for the weight at his head had dragged Toby out of the straight course, and it seemed that the sleigh was about being overset. But luckily this getting out of the straight course drew Toby himself into the hedge, and the whole was now stopped, a mixed mass—hedge, Jenny, Toby and companion, and the gentleman somewhere underneath. But in a moment he had struggled to his feet, a little confused, and was feeling his arm. Mrs. Lepell had recovered, and with presence of mind jumped out.

"Oh, Mr. Severne! Mr. Severne!" she cried, running to him. "You are not hurt?" she asked, in a sort of agony. "Oh, my saviour! my brave, gallant deliverer!" and in the instinct of the moment she caught his arm tenderly—(the *cloth*, we understand)—and then, with an instinct as sudden, let it go, and stood blushing, terrified and confused before him.

"Don't be frightened," he said; "compose yourself now—are you all right yourself—nothing hurt? I am a little crushed here," he added, touching his arm; "that brute must have stood on me, I think. Where's Lord John? was he flung out?"

Here was Lord John, hurrying on from behind to reach the weck. As he came up he slackened his pace, and looked at them with a sort of defiant self-justification. "It was all the beast's fault. I couldn't help it, Mrs. Lepell. You may say what you like; but you know number one——"

She interrupted him eagerly. "Indeed it was not your fault, Lord John. I saw you try to clutch at the rein as it passed; and, oh! Lord John, I was so frightened! I thought you *would be down under the horses' hoofs*."

Lord John looked at her inquiringly, and with a very curious glance; then said, "Well, I did my best, you know. The fault was in my getting down at all. If I could have just reached the rein; but I missed it—by, I suppose, a quarter of an inch."

"I saw it, indeed," said the lady. "How you escaped was a miracle. Oh! Mr. Severne, what shall I say—what shall I do—to my deliverer—*my two deliverers*?"

Lord John laughed. "That's good. No, no; I aint a hero. Our friend there was more in luck. Thank *him*. We must get this thing straight. Here, you fellow"—this was to the cottager—"stir yourself, can't you? Why didn't you come up? I suppose you'd stand by, and see us all killed, before you'd hurry yourself. Don't stand gaping there, you bumpkin, but put your shoulder to it."

Thus rebuked, the rustic set to work to disentangle the mass, under his lordship's direction. "Loose that rein first, stupid! Don't you see a buckle there? D'ye want

to break the horse's leg—do you? Here, let me. I believe you don't care if you smash the whole thing," &c.

The lady's soft eyes were on Severne, and there was real feeling in her voice—"I don't know what to say to you—your bravery, your nobleness, and gallantry. Only for you I might be insensible at this moment, or lying at the bottom of that pond. Not so much matter, you will say. After all, it *is* a little hard—like a persecution; yesterday one escape from death, to-day another. Who knows what to-morrow may bring?"

There was something piteous in this complaint. It did seem a little more than just measure that this poor lady should be pursued with accidents. He spoke to her softly and kindly. "I am very sorry, indeed, very," he said; "and very glad I came up so opportunely. Here, take my arm. No wonder you are flurried. We shall have to walk some way. Or stay: let us look at this. You must have frightened these horses, Lord John?"

"Not I," said his lordship; "it's this infernal savage system of driving. Who ever heard of such a thing? Does well enough in Russia."

"And does well enough here," said Severne, "if it gets fair play. Steady, Toby. Poor old boy! Come up. Good fellow. That's it. I tell you what, it's two miles to the house, and very rough walking; so what do you say, Mrs. Lepell—will you try again and trust me?"

She turned pale, and shrank back. Lord John laughed. "Not she, indeed. Burnt child, you know. I don't blame her."

"I'll take you back; yes," said Severne, patting the horses, "as if we were going over the lawn. No? Well, then, you and Lord John must walk part of the way, and take care of each other, and I'll send the carriage."

"But you won't go yourself," said Mrs. Lepell, in great terror. "Those dreadful horses! No; you must not."

"Foolhardy, my friend," said Lord John, taking out a cigar case.

"Then I'll change my mind," said she; "I'll go. I

should like it; nothing shall prevent me. I am not in the least afraid."

"I was only joking," said Severne, a little surprised. "You had better go with Lord John. You had, indeed."

But Mrs. Lepell was excited. "I shall have my own way," she said. "Forgive me for being so positive. I want to redeem my character, and show you that I am not such a *dreadful* coward."

"Well, with all my heart," said he, looking mystified. "I don't quite follow. I don't think there is much danger; but still——"

She had got in. "No room for you, Lord John," he said.

"No one can turn me out now," she said, looking round and smiling. "As for Lord John, he has run sufficient risk already. I would not hear of *him*."

"Now then," said Severne. "Good Toby! Good Toby! Get along. That's it."

And Toby, after a moment's hesitation, and a sudden impulse to launch out as he had done before, thought better of it, and assuming a more sober carriage, began to canter along swiftly, with the sleigh grinding on musically behind.





CHAPTER IX.

PLANS FOR THE NIGHT.

LORD JOHN walked on by himself. After three quarters of an hour he got to the house, and as he crossed the hall, he saw Mrs. Lepell flitting down the other end. She stopped when she saw him, and ran to him. "I have a favour to ask," she said. "a little favour. Not to make any fuss about our little adventure to-day. It will come on me—on poor me; and they will laugh at my ill-luck, you know. *You* understand that view, Lord John—yesterday in the railway, to-day in the sleigh. Mr. Severne agrees with me, too."

Now, Lord John coming home had been turning the thing over very patiently. "They will be examining and cross-examining—and why this and why that? I should like to know am I to have my bones broken for a creature I only met yesterday? Catch me at it, indeed!" Now he entertained much more favourable views of the creature he met only yesterday. "Anything you like," he said. "I am willing, God knows. I think, too, Sir John wouldn't be pleased to hear Toby behaved so badly."

"Exactly," said she. "Though, indeed, we ought not to pass over your behaviour, Lord John, and your bravery in trying to save me."

He looked at her suspiciously. "To save you. How?"

"Ah! I saw what you did, Lord John, as we flew past,

though there were a hundred things dancing before my poor eyes. Did you grasp at the reins of that wild creature, and did you not fall back exhausted, and *in peril of your life?*" added Mrs. Lepell, slowly, and putting her hand to her forehead, "*or was it all a dream?* You won't admit that: I must run away now, though. They are planning something for the evening, and oh! Lord John," she added, coming back, "you will be glad to hear *he is mending every hour—every moment.*"

She was gone, and Lord John looked after her with more wonder than was ever seen in his face. "She beats little Tourlou," he said. (This was a reference to some passage in his lordship's past life.)

Mr. Canby did not cultivate skating, and had said early in the day that "he could not see what was in it." Of course, "if you liked sticking your legs here and your legs there, and going along like a postman," it was all right. In this view the Misses Fenton cordially concurred. Skating, therefore, with them became a pastime that degraded the human mind, to be classed with drinking. "By-the-way," said he to the two young ladies, "where is she—the woman out of the accident? I was greatly taken with her last night. I was indeed."

"I saw you were," said the younger, taking a bold line. "She is something in your style, Mr. Canby?"

Mr. Canby looked up to the ceiling, as if he was searching for the style there. "I declare yes," he said, "she is, more or less, you know. I admire that sort of sparkle. Oh, a clever married lady, there's nothing like it. If ever I was to marry, ha, ha—you laugh at the notion—I'd like to marry a clever married lady. But that wouldn't be allowed, you know—against the laws!"

The sisters were ruefully amused at this notion. Encouraged, the gentleman went on—

"'Pon my word, I am serious! You know, about girls there's a kind of a nursery business—want training and wisdom. I like wisdom. Oh no, I should never dream of marrying a girl. A widow, perhaps—though there are objections *there*. Money could get over a good deal. Well, now," said he, dismissing the subject wearily,

"what's this about to-night? Plays and that sort of thing! But who's to do it? you know. Have you got a programme made out?"

"The very thing!" they both said together, for they had trained their ideas to move in common, and the sudden force and unanimity of the two sisters was often found to produce a good and startling effect. "We wanted to talk it over. It will be such a surprise. No one is to know anything about it except Sir John and the actors."

"That's all very well, now," said Mr. Canby, full of "common sense;" "that's all very well; but you should have a programme. As for going on without a programme, we might all be as well at sea!"

It all burst with a flash on the elder sister. She had never thought of that. No one would ever have thought of it, had not Mr. Canby been providentially there and suggested it. "We forgot that," she said despondingly, "but there may be time yet to have them printed."

The younger sister saw the error; but Canby struck in first with "common sense."

"Printing!" he said, "what would you print? Of course, if anyone likes it, gratify 'em by all means!" The two sisters laughed in happy concert until that periodical "dying" came on and the subsequent happy resuscitation. Their laughter was so hearty and genuine, the young ladies holding on by the chair and the wainscot, and suffering so acutely, that his features relaxed. "You know it seemed so absurd," he said, good humouredly. "A programme isn't the thing a fellow gives you at a concert, and for which you give *him* a shilling. You should have a plan of action—know where you are—like the fellows in parliament. When a minister comes in, you know, he has to make out a line of business in his head, and tell his fellows, or they won't stick by him, you see. *That's* a programme."

The sisters followed this professorial explanation with wonder, and looked at each other with speechless delight, as if the Philosopher's stone had been suddenly revealed, or rather, as other ordinary persons would have looked

on such a communication; for, to say the truth, the sisters had no great interest in the grand arcana of Nature; and would have received the polarisation of light, the new metal, the electric telegraph, &c., with no surprise, and only a pleasant smile. They then fell to talking on the project for the night, into which Mr. Canby entered graciously, and with more alacrity.

The sisters were clever in their way, and had already in their room settled a "programme" of their operations. They, indeed, had arranged it all diligently in their rooms; had in fact some "stock" charades, which they carried about with them from house to house, having the "business" well in their minds, and being ready to "mount" them at an hour's notice.

"Flirtin' would be a good word," said Mr. Canby, reflectively. "A lady and gent, you know, going on in a room, saying the regular thing, and then some one would come and ring a bell, and away they'd cut, alarmed, you know, afraid of being caught."

The two sisters screamed with delight: Flirt—ting—ting-ting of the bell, don't you see? It was so new and so original. Well, yes, it was. He had lain awake half the night at the barracks making it out, but it was well worth it. Still in their secret hearts the sisters were embarrassed, because, to say the truth, the word was defective. The reader will see that a certain violence would have to be used to carry out Mr. Canby's view, and get the two words out of "Flirting," to say nothing of the "whole" being the same as the first word. Yet the young ladies seemed to be indulgent enough to pass by these little defects, and accept it for all and all.

"There now," said Mr. Canby, "you work it between you. I have started you, you see, and shall go and have a pipe."

When he had gone they looked at each other with contempt.

"What a ridiculous, nonsensical notion! He'll spoil everything. Why it's no word at all."

"Then why did you take it up so greedily?" said her

sister. "I shan't stand up to be made a fool of acting such nonsense—ting-ting, indeed!"

Severne now came up.

"What's this you have planning?" he said. "I hear you are going to entertain us to-night—how good-natured of you."

"No, indeed," they said together; "only a notion of Mr. Canby's."

"Oh, has *he* a hand in it? Poor Canby! Then it will be great fun; make him come forward."

"But you must help, indeed you must; and Captain Philips, and Mr. Selby, and everybody."

"Nonsense," said Severne, "we are all mere country rustics. You are well trained, and will show us how to do it properly. The carpenter is at work already, and at your orders; a very smart fellow, and will do whatever you tell him. By-the-way, I'll tell you now—engage that Mrs. Lepell, she's clever and a half, I can tell you, and will act like a professional."

"Oh, oh, Mr. Severne!" the two young ladies broke out, with that almost supernatural *entente* which has mystified us so much before; "how *wicked* of you! How *shamefully* wicked!"

"How? No, not I," he said, calmly. "Shameful! wicked! what odd words! Canby can be wicked in that way. I mean merely the plain, practical sense of the thing. I'll stake my reputation—which is not much, however—and my judgment—if I have any—that she has great powers, and you could not do better than secure her."

But the sisters did not receive this proposal with alacrity.

"We could hardly, *I think*," said one. "You know, her husband—it would be unfeeling."

Now came up Selby. "I hear of a surprise for to-night. Mum's the word; but I only hope it's true."

"All right, Selby," said his friend, "and we owe it all to these young ladies—manageresses and everything, who have planned it all sitting at home here, while we, selfish beasts, have been amusing ourselves."

"Oh, I am so glad!" said Selby, with immense animation; "and I'll tell you what I was thinking of as I came along the gallery—what will carry the thing off and bring down the house——"

"Oh tell us, Mr. Selby," said the two girls, smiling and delighted.

He looked round mysteriously, and with a little shyness said—"Get that clever Mrs. Lepell to do something. She will carry it all through for you. I know she can act."

"There! What did I tell you?" said Severne. "General opinion seems to run that way."

A curious expression came into the faces of the two Servants of Society, as we may without disrespect call them. For a moment their discipline gave way. "Mrs. Lepell seems to be everything now," said one.

"Well, she *is* clever," said Severne, gravely. "I would recommend you to secure her. Of course if you want the thing to fall through——"

"Yes! and I tell you what," said Selby, very eagerly, "*I'll manage it*. I'll go and find Sir John, and make him ask her. She can't refuse him, you know. I know where he is now," and Selby ran off.

It seems a little hard certainly that these faithful Servants of the World should by some fatality come in always for such rude knocks. For one would think by the tone of the two gentlemen that the girls, instead of trying to contribute a little to the entertainment of the house, were carrying out some interested scheme of their own. No doubt the faithful Virgins and Martyrs of the World are more than indemnified by secret transports and comforts, of which we have no conception.

But alas! were there not yet greater trials to come? Before long they saw the lady, at the end of the long gallery, with *at least four gentlemen* about her, all apparently remonstrating and pressing some request eagerly. One of these was Sir John, and another the "white-livered" Canby. The spectacle was not agreeable, and they turned away. But in a short time Selby was eagerly hunting for them, and, out of breath, came rushing to find

them. "You are wanted," he said brusquely—here were more of the cruel trials of the world—"come quick. She has agreed to do it. We managed it. Come along. There's no time to be lost. We are keeping her waiting." But the sisters, though suffering—they could not have been mortal else—went away with alacrity. Too much capital had, so to speak, been sunk in the officer—he was of the Norfolk Canbys, son to Sir John Canby, who owned Canby House, and Conservative colleague to Lord Toleper, of Toleper's Barn, and who had his twelve thousand a year "if he had a penny," only one brother, *and no mother living*—to allow it all to be lost through being disheartened.

There was a busy council being held. Mrs. Lepell in a moment had struck out brilliant ideas. She gently put aside Mr. Canby's scheme. It is very clever, so dreadfully clever," she said, in deep thought. "Oh, *so* clever! But I'm afraid, you know.—There are the servants and the tenants, I believe, and *they* will want something that appeals more to *their* sense. Nothing so refined and elegant—something coarser, I fear, will only do." Then in a moment she had mapped out a scheme certainly more practical than Mr. Canby's. That gentleman accepted the withdrawal of his piece with perfect good humour. He seemed to see an intelligence in Mrs. Lepell's eyes, as who should say, "*Later and privately* I will explain the greater reasons."

On that night the table was very full. Sir John had asked a dinner party, and a very large one, of squires and their wives; good "sound" men who would stand by the ship—at least in the sense of what he defined standing by the ship. —"Though, God knows," said Sir John, "the poor ship is in a pretty way!"

There was a clergyman, a doctor, and some young men whose profession was hunting or cattle, and who delighted in the companionship of the beasts of the field.

Sir John went up to talk with poor Jack Lepell's cousin just before dinner—arrayed in his best high-collared

"skimpy" gilt-buttoned coat (same as in the picture painted for the old *anti*-Reform Association, temp. 1830, by Skrine, R.S.A., then much in fashion for political portraits).

"My dear fellow," he said, "how are you? I wish to God you were up, and could come down; it would do your heart good to see the men I could show you at my table to-day—real '88 men—the bone and sinew, Sir—men of the stamp that got us Habeas Corpus and Magna Charta, and went down to Torbay, Sir, to meet their king. But a few left, Sir, now—only a few. There's not encouragement to be loyal. Well, how are you getting on?"

But Mr. Lepell was not well enough to stir, even for this view of his moral interests. He was, indeed, a little feeblener than in the morning, being tired out with the day.

"Well, well, perhaps it is better," said Sir John. "We'll send you something. The *John Bull* ought to be in now. Ah! They know how to write in *that* paper. There was an article, let me see, yesterday or the day before, called 'The Whig Murrain,' as well done as Junius, every bit; I'll get it from Duncan. He devours it, and to tell you the truth I encourage it among *them* and subscribe for another copy for the servants' hall. It keeps up a good, pure, moral tone among 'em. Yes, I'll tell Duncan. There's to be some sport to-night. I gave 'em the use of the carpenters, and, egad, they've put up a stage-play-house thing. Goodness! it makes me think of poor Perceval, as true and pure a man as ever stepped, whom those vile Whigs got shot in the lobby. Not two years before he died he had some of these stage plays at his house (read his Bible, though, twice a day). Your wife, I hear, is wonderful at them. I can tell you I begin to like her, for she is sound wind, limb, and body—all the women, Sir, are forced to be the other way nowadays to get a husband at all—all them low, wandering Whigs, without an acre, except what they'll just get to bury them, and too good for them," &c.

Thus did the Baronet ramble on, as he always did when this subject seized on him. Mr. Lepell, ill and weary, listened patiently and with what appeared to be devotion.





CHAPTER X.

THE DINNER PARTY.

DOWN in the drawing-room the guests were coming in. The Bonds, of Bond Hall; Claymore, of Bushmills; Charley Ridge; Sir Thomas Hall, of Stonehall; Rev. Mr. Bush, &c., &c., &c. There were a great many, and besides, that "bone and sinew" class to which Sir John had alluded, to whom we were indebted for the Habeas Corpus, landing at Torbay, &c., and amongst whom were to be found the saviours of the country. Sir Thomas Hall, of Stonehall, who was to be chief saviour, and whose ancestor had been on the shingles at Torbay, from his appearance, seemed hardly up to the physical standard—being a small, red-faced, cheerful gentleman, with a red bald head, and two flat brushes of hair on each side, like the winkers of a horse, or as one of the facetious young jesters of the party likened them to, the two tufts on each side of the clown's head in a pantomime.

They set down "positively two and thirty strong," in the large hall. Captain Philips took in a clergyman's wife, whom he very soon found out to be a thrifty, house-keeping woman, and who had all need, poor soul, for such gifts, having some seven or eight children to house-keep for. Still her delight was in making "good things," and "our clotted cream, you know, Captain Philips, has a regular name about here. We send it over to Sir John here regularly at Christmas and Easter, with currant jelly and marmalade." Captain Philips, who had

been letting "the woman talk on," as he said ("always my way,") now pricked up his ears, and turned from his plate to look at her.

"Oh, that was *yours*, was it?" he said; "uncommon good, I can tell you, if you could get enough of it. The women here at breakfast are so greedy, there is no getting a chance. The marmalade was really fair, had flavour, and not too thick or greasy. The Scotch, I am told, thicken it with lard—only fancy!"

The clergyman's wife's cheeks glowed with pleasure.

"I am so glad you liked it. If you were at all near us, I am sure we should be delighted to——"

"Well, I am," said the other—"quartered in the town, you know. I have a house there, Mrs. Philips and the children; a low, beastly den, for which, of course, we have to pay double what we would do in town. If you would, I should really be much obliged to you. A few pots, you know."

"Oh, the moment I get back," said the lady, eagerly, "I'll make up a little hamper."

"Just a few pots, you know—no, by-the-way, better make two parcels, you know. The cream might catch the taste of the other—it does, somehow. It's very kind indeed of you. I'll send over my man."

"No trouble, I assure you," said the lady, more delighted. "We can put it in the gig—*he* passes the door, you know."

"No, better say my man," said Captain Philips, firmly. "I'll lay it out *that* way." He afterwards said, truly enough, that he saw what the woman was at "Mrs. Philips, you know—too old a soldier to be brought into an acquaintance with a parson's wife for a pot of jam."

Sir Thomas Hall, of Stonehall, was fluently talking at the end of the table, illustrating his talk with great gesticulations. He was very pleasant and fluent, and laughing cordially in every sentence he delivered. He liked his joke, and could joke even on sacred subjects—*i.e.* Conservatism, &c.

"I am always open to the mess of pottage, you know,"

he said. "When a man gives that out without disguise there is no harm in it: and yet they have never tried to corrupt me. I suppose if they had I should have done like every other man they have tried to corrupt. Hey, Sir John?"

Sir John knew he was "sound in wind and limb;" "right to the backbone;" "would stand by the poor old ship;" so he could have every indulgence for these sportive sallies.

Sir Thomas Hall went on, in the same strain—"Every man has his price, you know; not in money down, my dear Sir John, or in a cheque on Coutts; but there is something that will buy us all, you know. For instance, Sir John, there—if they repealed that thing of twenty-nine, and passed an Act that no Whig should ever hold office—that might be Sir John's price."

Sir John laughed. "Ah! my dear friend. They hounded on the mob to shoot poor Perceval, a pure man, that served his Sovereign," &c.

There was a sort of coterie near the top of the table. Lady Hall, of Stonehall, was next Sir John; Mrs. Severne, Severne himself, Lord John, Mrs. Lepell, and that good-natured friend of Severne's, who was actually next to her.

Mrs. Lepell had changed wonderfully within a day. She was no longer timorous and shrinking, as some of the ladies would have put it (modest, her friends would have called it), but could take her place "firmly, like the wife of Jack Lepell's cousin."

She was getting on in the house. She was telling her adventure of the day; but presently Severne began to cross-examine:

"It was a wonderful escape," he said, looking round. "I know I performed prodigies; and must write up and claim the Humane Society's medal. Such dashing gallantry—such splendid chivalry should get *something*. But Lord John, let us hear how does *he* come in? because *he* did his part too, you know, or tried to—did he not?"

"Oh, bless your soul, leave me out of it," said

Lord John, a little disturbed. "I claim nothing, recollect."

"No—I know that," said Severne, "but from mere curiosity. Seriously, I want to know how it took place? Who frightened the horse?"

"I didn't, I'll swear," said Lord John. "All I know is, I did my best to stop him. Some fellows, my boy, get into a better line for that sort of thing. I was pulling a stake out of the hedge at the time; and it was well the pole didn't drive right through my back."

"Lord John did all that a brave gentleman could do," said Mrs. Lepell in her calm, quiet, almost reproving tone. Then she went on, as it were with a narrative. "He got down to try and do something with the horses. There was a switch in the hedge——"

"Then God bless me," said Sir John, "where was the whip?"

"The whip was of no use," said she, "Sir John. We had tried everything with the horses. The question was, were they to master Lord John, or he them? He was actually pulling a switch out, which at the moment I really thought had been put there by Providence, when the horses gave a plunge, and oh"—Mrs. Lepell covered her eyes a moment.

"Quite an adventure," said Sir Thomas Hall; "how dreadful!"

"I assure you, Sir Thomas Hall," she continued, turning to *him*, "the carriage flew past Lord John as close as that glass is to *that*. You could not have put a sheet of paper between. My eyes seemed to swim; I thought I should have fainted; but, Lord John, I must tell this in spite of all your looks and nods and cautions, as I say, though there was a mist before my eyes, I saw an arm strike out wildly at the reins—and——"

"Pooh, pooh," said Lord John, heartily; "nonsense. It was self-defence. I was frightened out of a year's growth. I'll never get to my full size, and you are the cause, Mrs. L., and no one else."

"Ah! you may laugh, Lord John," she said, excitedly, "you may, indeed, and make little of it, and I know to

save a poor weak woman from a horrible death, is only a trifle, but *I* think it no trifle, and never shall. You would have passed it over, and not said a word about it; but I could not in conscience."

"Ah, stop, Madam," said his Lordship, "you are making my virgin cheeks blush."

Severne was looking on with great amusement, and yet with a little pique.

"Why, it seems it is Lord John should get the medal after all—not I; quite right too. *He* is a preserver also."

Lord John laughed loudly.

"There's a fix for you, Mrs. L. Egad, yes, it comes to that; and nothing for the fellow that really saved her. Oh, uncommon good!"

Mrs. Lepell looked down on her plate sadly; she stole a look of reproach at Lord John, but said nothing. Suddenly Selby broke in with great warmth—

"I understood," he said, "I followed quite. Never mind, Mrs. Lepell, I know what you mean as well as if I was there. None of us here understand you, except—except——" He stopped and coloured.

"Except you. Well done, my knight," said Lord John; "spoken out like a man. 'Pon my word, this is coming out."

They all laughed; even Mrs. Lepell *could not but smile* at such advocacy, which only made her ridiculous to a certain degree, as we can all understand. But the result was, this honest fellow was overwhelmed with confusion. After all the best-intentioned of the community; even the righteous by profession resent this indiscreet advocacy and panegyric, and reasonably, because it frustrates its own ends, and makes the object a little ridiculous. Thus the dinner passed on, and Sir John took up politics, and Sir Thomas Hall, dismissing his bantering manner, began to talk of "the county," and then of the "election."

The country gentlemen then became very wise and eager.

"As for young Groper," said Sir Thomas, "he be

hanged. What does the old lord mean forcing his lad on us? Does he think he has got one of his rotten boroughs here, to stuff one of his relations into?"

"I tell *you* what," said Sir John; "I found out old Groper ten years ago! He's a mere shopman, Sir—would sell you and me, Sir, and the party over his counter. He's all things to all men. He's unsound, Sir, wind and limb—a mere discounter in politics."

"I suspected that, do you know," said Sir Thomas; "but I think we can guess where to light on the right man for the right place," and he looked round meaningly at Severne. "Unfurl the blue flag, rally your true men, Sir John."

"Save England, Sir," said Sir John; "nail our colours to the mast, and no surrender, and I don't care who you put in."

"Ah!" said Sir Thomas; "that's the tune. There can be no mistake in *this* house. We know the sort of article that can be got here, the true sample, Sir, and of the right stuff. My dear Sir John, we will bring him in, in a canter. Eh, Severne?"

Sir John looked delighted. All turned to Severne as if expecting a rapturous profession of faith, in reference to *this* nailing something to that wonderful mast which by this time must be almost "honeycombed" with the holes of nails that have been driven in, and invisible from the shreds of old bunting. But Severne only laughed.

"I'll make a very poor hand of it. I haven't energy to fight for the poor old Constitution. I don't know how to stop the leaks. I don't see any mast. You'd better have young Groper."

"How modest we are," said Lord John, sneeringly. "I declare it's charming."

"The true Blue is always modest," said Sir John; "wait until you hear him on the hustings. He'll give you doctrine. Come, my lad, speak out. Good sound stuff, Sir, the real old port."

"Ah, if he could give us *that*," said Lord John; "it would be worth all the politics ever bottled or unbottled."

Eh, Mrs. Lepell? Sir John says *you* are a rank Tory. I don't believe it; and as to Severne, there, why I'll wait till we get him on the hustings; and until he prints his address. I doubt," he added, in a low voice, "if he'll turn out quite as blue as we all think. Our friend wasn't born during the Flood. I should say he'd go with the young hounds, and run a regular buck on 'em. However, that's their look out, not mine. I must give him my vote any way, for I owe Groper a grudge, an impudent, upsetting beggar, and as greedy as a pike. Egad, Mrs. L., you'll canvass for us. I'm going to start myself one of these days. At this moment I know a fellow looking out for a borough as rotten as old cheese—the more rotten the better—you'll come down and canvass for me, won't you, for *the man, you know, that saved you?* Eh, you follow me, don't you?"

Lord John was in a half-jocose, half-malicious humour; but those who knew him well held that this tone was a sign of favourable disposition towards those to whom he employed it. He was, indeed, much pleased with Mrs. Lepell about the little affair of the sledge, and after dinner told Captain Philips, to that officer's open disgust, that "she was the top lot of the whole fair."

It was now close on nine o'clock. From the dining-hall they heard the gigs and carriages driving in. Sir John had asked all within a radius of ten miles, and those who were asked came. The doctor and wife and daughters; more clergymen, more wives and daughters; Hubbard of the mills, and his wife and daughters. "What, Sir John, and one of those milling scoundrels under *your* roof?"

"Nothing of the kind, Sir. He knows his place—as humble as my groom there. That man used to drive a little donkey-cart with turnips. I respect a fellow that raises himself *and knows his place*, and sticks to his mills, and don't go buying land, and trying to become a gentleman. No, I can distinguish." And Sir John *did* distinguish with great warmth; but at this moment, Mr. Hubbard, the "milling scoundrel," stimulated, it must

be said, by Mrs. Hubbard, who was yearning to become "a lady," had actually given orders to a London agent to keep an eye out for an eligible thing, in the way of an estate, about a hundred and twenty thousand or so.





CHAPTER XI.

THE CHARADES.

IN the drawing-room they found a very great company assembled. Those who were to play had flitted off to get ready dresses, &c. But those active organisers, the Misses Fenton, well trained to such offices, had left the dinner-table early to get properties and dresses, and had worked promptly and efficiently; so that everyone found in his or her room what was required, neatly folded up and ready. Now that *business* had asserted its claims, they showed all the virtues of steady industry, forethought, and diligence. Everyone was astonished, everything was provided, and even the sisters' needles had been at work, sewing on frillings and furbelows.

The Barrister who practised at country houses had been found invaluable; and showed a profound acquaintance with at least this branch of the Bar. He showed himself indefatigable, and had co-operated with the Misses Fenton in a very hearty and skilful way. At last word was brought, very mysteriously, to Sir John, that all things were now ready, and the curtain about to rise, and there was a mysterious flutter round the room. It was time to begin.

"Ha, indeed," said Sir John; "very good then; I suppose we had better move on."

He then told this news, and went round the company, and the agricultural ladies and gentlemen gathered together, with a strange flutter and eagerness. They had

but a dreamy idea of what manner of entertainment this might turn out to be.

Sir John's carpenters had indeed done wonders. They had taken much delight in the office ; and one, a "handy man," prided himself specially upon the skill with which he had constructed a real curtain, that went up and down on true theatrical principle. All through the night this handy man kept his eyes upon his work, superintended its going up and down with delight, and at the close joined respectfully in the general felicitation on the success of the whole, saying that "there hadn't been a single hitch," meaning to refer to his curtain. Chairs had been set in front in rows ; chairs certainly a little irregular in symmetry : for even the high-backed Cattermole chairs had been brought in out of the outer hall.

Sir John Digby and Lady Hall, and the other distinguished Conservatives, sat in front. Behind, the servants, the steward, the more comfortable of the labourers, and the keepers, crowded in. Captain Philips and another gentleman—a young fellow going into the army—were not present. The former had surveyed all the company filing off, with unconcealed mistrust and dislike—then said to Lord John—

"I say, you going with the rest, to see the children?"

"Egad I am," said Lord John ; "I wouldn't miss it. The women are going to dance and show off, my boy ; and our sick friend's wife too—poor devil. She may come out in tights on us, my lad, for all you or I know."

"Oh, that's the way, is it?" said the other, with more disgust. "Take care you're not roaring with that lumbago in the morning—at your age, you know. I was thinking of a quiet game with the balls, while they were at their foolery, and a snug cigar, with something warm, you know."

"All very good," said Lord John ; "but won't do at present, you see. I've travelled, my friend, and got up in the morning, and paid for my schooling, eh?" and

Lord John fell into a series of intelligent contortions. "You follow, eh?"

"Indeed I do not," said Captain Philips, turning away.

He then caught the young gentleman, whom he addressed with a sort of cold command.

"I suppose you'll go and look on at their grown-up tumblers, eh! I am going to have a game, quietly, with a cigar. Don't *you* be a fool—stay, if you like."

He was in great awe of Captain Philips, and his knowledge of the world; and though dying to see the "show," yet wished to show that he was not quite ignorant of the world. He remained, played, was treated injuriously by his companion, who was free and sarcastic on him, and when he had no further occasion for his services, after the game was done, sat down to enjoy his cigar, and declined to fatigue himself talking to "a young cur" of that sort, as he afterwards happily described him.

At the extemporised stage it was wonderful how much had been "got up" in the time. The young Barrister—Mr. Weeder—who was "in such business at country houses," had done much and had taken a great burden on himself. A bell was heard to ring behind, the curtain was drawn aside, and he came out in front to speak a prologue.

"Such a clever thing," everyone said afterwards, "and—would you believe it?—he just sat at a side table, and knocked it off in about ten minutes. It would have made you die with laughter," people said later, telling the story to their friends, "and all impromptu, you know, not a line of it thought of before three o'clock, and then he just sat down at a side table, and knocked it off." And yet, if the truth must be told, it was not such a feat in our Barrister, if we consider that he took about with him on his "circuit" at country houses a sort of "common form" for these sort of things, just as other lawyers take about "Davidson's Precedents," and a very little adaptation made it fit all occasions excellently. He came out in a grotesque dress, began with a shy start of surprise, which threw everybody into convulsions of laughter:—

“Lord, what a crowd ! I’m really quite alarmed,
 Inclined to run away—yet no—I’m charmed !
 Such grace, such beauty, must all fears dispel,
 Remove all doubt, and makes me feel—*quite well* !

(These last words spoken with infinite roguishness,
 which provoked a titter.)

“But what’s the play to-night ? Macbeth ? Well, well, well !
 Tell, then, you ask—*Not surely William Tell ?*”

(A roar of laughter, which obliges the humorist to
 stop ; but he is all the while looking on with good-
 humoured toleration. He goes on, when order is re-
 stored, in the same pleasant and animated way.)

“And what’s the sport ?—a farce—a comedy ?
 A sol—emn tra—ge—dy ?

(Here the hollow cavernous tone of the speaker caused
 fresh amusement).

“Once more *do* try
 Some like a speech—some like the charming Bards ;
 Some like *bard cl. ics*, and others like *chairhards*.”

There was a moment’s hesitation ; the speaker paused
 with a look of intense amusement ; but he *knew* it would
 come, as he told them behind the curtain. “I let ’em
 take their time, and they got it at last.” So they did, for
 someone said in a delightful whisper, “Chair hard, Hard
 chair ! don’t you see ?” and the burst of comprehension
 spread like an Atlantic wave over the room. It had to
 be explained, however, laboriously to the country gentle-
 men.

“Uncommonly good, that, you know ; a very clever
 young fellow from circuit, and said one of the best things
 I ever heard—the difference between a hard chair and
 char-ade. Real wit, Sir.”

These lines had strictly followed the common form,
 and had been delivered to many audiences in many

country houses. But presently came a little change—a slight variation, which might still be considered a common form :—

“Who are our actors? fairly will you ask,
With whom you now attempt your arduous task;
Ah, ladies fair, behind this curtain guess,
We really have *embarras de Richesses*.
And one great aid we surely must have leant on,
Those fascinating stars, the Misses Fenton.

(*A roar.*)

Nor must I pass her by, the fair Lepell,
Whom we may fairly call—a *railway belle*.”

(*Another roar.*)

And most natural one. For everyone had been talking of the accident, and had heard of the happy escape of the lady.

“Uncommonly good that,” the country gentlemen said. “You heard, didn’t you—the bell, you know, of the railway station? A clever young fellow as ever I met, you know.”

“So with the rest: and say what must that man be,
Who would not be content with—martial Canby.
But, oh, our bliss would be complete from stem to stern,
Could we bring here that charming stream, *Severne*!”

And the knowing fellow looked gallantly among the audience for the lady alluded to. The house “came down.” He then concluded with these two happy lines :—

“Now burnt to ashes may my horse-hair wig be,
All luck attend our brave old host of Digby!”

This was touching the true chord. Everyone understood *that*, and something like a cheer arose for the sentiment. Sir John was pleased. “He has great talents,” he said to his neighbour; “shouldn’t be surprised if he were a judge one of these days. His great uncle, Ma’am, was a baron of the Court of Exchequer,

and though as great a Tory as ever stepped, the Whigs *had* to put him in. They positively couldn't get a decent fellow out of their own gang. A very fair young fellow indeed, and with good principles, and I hope he will do well."

Hush ! The curtain is going up. Loud applause, and richly deserved—for here is a room, a regular room, with a bar in the centre, contrived cleverly by two Indian folding screens, and with a barmaid *in* the bar, looking out as if through a window, and a porter machine, with handles for "pulling," glasses, bottles, everything complete ; and a sign, painted cleverly on a bit of old newspaper—

THE DIGBY ARMS.

This one touch—due to Miss Fenton, it must be said—made the whole world there akin. Everyone knew that hostelry, and this counterfeit presentment seemed to embody the relations of employer and employed—a kind landlord, good and faithful tenants. Everyone, as they applauded, were affected, except of course Lord John, who said, "Egad, I never saw a sign *inside* a public before." But the barmaid's cap, ribbons, apron, everything was charming. Separate applause for Miss Canby, the younger, as she came out of her bar. Perfectly at home, never at a loss for a word, she tossed her head, and told her little story.

Sairy the barmaid.—"Lord, I am sure the Digby Arms never was so full before. Folks will come during the race-week, and fuss a body so, one loses one's little wits quite. Lord, a deary me, what am I to do, and where am I to put the folks ? Here's a letter from Lord Timbertoes, two rooms. Lady Snuffle Buffle (this comic name was coined, invented, and patented by the clever

young Barrister—"only think, *just* as we were going on"), Mr. and Mrs. Manjack, two rooms—and here, I declare, yes, a note from Sir John, wanting two himself. Bless his dear 'art," added the charming barmaid, kissing the letter, and simulating a Cockney accent, "the 'ole set shall pack out, every one on 'em, bag and baggage, afore I'd bring myself to disappoint that dear good Sir John Digby."

Need we say that the performance had to be suspended, to give an opening for the burst of applause at this happy allusion? The tenants at the distance, who understood the sign-board and the bar, thoroughly, thundered an agricultural applause with a "The'er be t'ould Sir John! Hooray!" No real live barmaid, it was pronounced, could do the thing better; and above all, no one enjoying the young lady's intimacy in domestic life, could believe that she had this gay vein undeveloped beneath.

But what was this to the next incident, when the lively Barrister, with a real apron on, and an old blue jacket, which he had actually gone down to the town to borrow—for "Realism" is the soul of these things—and a genuine strap of pewter pots on his back, came pattering in with the brisk walk of a waiter, and with a smart "Coming! coming, Sir!"—proceeded to draw the beer—*real* beer, mind you—and contrived to get a good "head" on the pewter pot, which he held with infinite dexterity and without spilling a drop.

Barmaid.—"Well, William, any signs of the company? Lawk! how I am worried."

William (wiping his forehead with the corner of his apou, which produces a roar).—"Yes, indeed, *Marm*. I never gets no rest now at all. Have to sleep, *Marm*, in the tap. (*Roar again*). Hope, *Marm*, Sir John be coming? A kindly, civil-spoken gentleman, *Marm*. That I do hopes, *Marm*, they'll make a nobleman of one of these days, and no man deserves it better."—(*Fresh applause.*)

Then the bells begin to ring, and all behind to stamp and shout, a token of carriages and company arriving; and really words could not describe the capital picture of ludicrous confusion into which the two servants were

thrown. They went backwards and forwards, flying to this side and that, running to the right and to the left; rushing up against each other, answering with a sort of competition, "Here, Sir!" "Yes, Marm!" until after ten minutes or so, when the barmaid was leaning faint and exhausted, with her hand on her waist against the wall, and the waiter, in his hurry, had purposely tripped, and tumbled down flat, human nature could not resist any longer, and the house rose at them. "*Talk of Liston and Munden,*" said an old country gentleman, with his golden glasses in his hands, "I saw 'em, and I assure you that young fellow is very much in their way—uncommon good." Lord John was growling. He was getting thirsty, perhaps. "That's fine acting, isn't it?" he said; "uncommon fine selfishness, too. They are not going to give anyone else a chance. We'll be all night here at this rate. What a witty cub that is. Dam 'em, do they mean to get on to-night?"

Then came in the guests, a motley crowd, made up in the most comic dresses, old white hats, capes, wrappers, and huge mufflers—carrying white bandboxes and paper parcels, like old nurse-tenders' umbrellas; in short, as some one remarked, "dressed exactly as we see the travellers on the railway any day of our lives." All these were vociferating, speaking together, complaining, shouting, expostulating, and making a most amusing Babel of sounds. Several of this class were naturally inclined to distinguish themselves a little, and get a small share of the favour of the audience—a not unreasonable claim; but such was the enthusiasm, the perfect identification of themselves with their parts that possessed both waiter and barmaid, that they unconsciously, perhaps, absorbed all the dialogue of the little piece. This bore a little hard on one gentleman, who had been at great pains to get himself up as a travelling old gentleman, with the invariable broad brimmed Quaker's hat and coachman cloak, large stick and spectacles, with which old gentlemen always travel, and who had indeed prepared some capital things.

"It was an infernal shame," this ill-used player said

afterwards; "that greedy beast thinks nobody has a tongue but himself. Gabble, gabble. Infernal, so it is. Calling this sort of thing charades. Pooh."

At the proper point the "handy man" let down the curtain, which descended beautifully and without a hitch. The point now was to guess what was it. "Bar, eh? The lawyer, you know. 'Brought up to the bar.' Ha, ha! very good!—uncommon good! Papa, papa! do you know what Mr. Sweetman says?" Mr. Sweetman was the new curate, sly, and shy, and demure, and always saying "good things" in his own sly and shy way; Papa was the one who had seen Liston and Munden—"Mr. Sweetman says that it is 'Brought to the Bar.'"

"Brought *up*," said Mr. Sweetman, softly.

"My God!" said Lord John, standing up and stretching himself before the whole company, "to think that we are all grown up people here, and supposed to be sensible men and women!—which we are, my dear young creature, of course."

"I *know* you have guessed it, Lord John," said the dear young woman. "I am sure of it."

"Why, must we guess, too?" said he. "They want to put *that* on us, do they? a charade, is it? To be sure. Don't you see? Hotel, hotel—*inn*—there, there, that's it; that's the regular word. Bless you, my dear, these creatures have their regular stock-in-trade and fixtures, and something or other. The next word will be mate, or something of that sort. My goodness! talk of the nineteenth century, and here we are, tumbling like children in a nursery!"

Lord John was now getting very dry indeed about the throat, and in a few moments had "slipped out quietly" towards the housekeeper's room. He used to take Mrs. Hardcastle under the chin sometimes, in that amazingly free way of his, which is passed over in Lord Johns, and told her she put him in mind of "a devilish fine woman at Mr. Roche's ten years ago. And let me tell you, my dear creature, I was the man in the place she cared least for—of course I was. Treated me like a dog—eh? Of course she did. My dear child, quick with that brown

gruel of yours; I'm scalding down the red lane here. Ah! that's soft and sugary."

Though he was away a long time, the curtain had not risen when he came back. "Always the way," said Lord John. "Bet you a sovereign they are smirking together at this moment, hobnobbing over their drink. 'Oh, *you* were capital.' And the other one tells *him*, 'And you were *so* funny—never heard anything better! And how the audience laughed.' 'It's going capitally.' That's the word—'going capitally.' This is absurd, waiting in this way! I'll just go and speak to the Baronet." And he actually did; and in a moment a message arrived behind the scenes from Sir John, hoping that they were ready.

Lord John's penetration was wonderful, for they were actually, as he described, telling each other that it was "Going capitally." But they were ready now, and the curtain rose slowly, and showed a study—a little darkened, but laid out with taste. The room of a virtuoso: books, drawings, a picture on an easel, crimson draperies, and a small female statue out of the gallery, at one side. A lamp was burning, and Severne, in a black velvet robe, with a very low collar, and looking specially handsome, was sitting, his hand to his forehead, reading and studying. The courtesy that could grudge this good-looking apparition the cheap tribute of a round of applause, must have been of a poor sort. Something in the management of the lights gave a rich hue to the whole, and made it seem like a picture.

"Egad, that's not so bad," said Lord John to his neighbour; "there's a touch of the what-ye-may-call-it in that;" who or what he alluded to the neighbour did not know, but it is likely that he meant something artistic.

Presently Severne rose, and began in a dreamy way to talk of something that was past. Then the clock was heard to strike.

Severne.—"Midnight! one more day gone with the rest, yet the end seems as far away as ever; yet it must be coming. Oh, how I long for the peaceful quiet of the grave! sweet, happy, long expected hour, when I shall rejoin *her*, that dear innocent—the darling long-lost maid

—she whom I so cruelly betrayed.” Then he began softly and melodiously a well-known monody. The rustics high and low were impressed by it, and stretched their necks to make out that raven which they were sure was over the bust of Pallas. Indeed the Barrister was even eager that some concrete realisation on this part of the poem should be carried out.

“The thing won’t go off at all, Severne,” he said; “just clap a stuffed bird up there and give him a go of paint, and you’ll see if that doesn’t touch ’em up; and I tell you what, my boy, we might have a black thread to his wings and not a soul ’ud see it, and we could make ’em flap at the proper points. See here :

“And the Raven said—

‘Never more.’”

Thus flap! flap! My goodness! Why, they’d rise at you!” But Severne could not enter into this brilliant picture.

“They’d only laugh,” he said; “it would turn it into a burlesque. No, no; leave it to me and Mrs. Lepell; you concentrate yourself on the business of the piece.”

He went on: “What is there for me now? What remains but misery and agony, and an end too long delayed? When will it come?—when will she come?”

Suddenly was heard soft and ravishing strains of celestial music—in fact, a very costly harmonium touched by the fingers of one of the Miss Fentons. They had sent up, in a hurried manner, to Mr. Sweetman for a “book of the anthems, dear Mr. Sweetman!” (That clergyman, from the spasmodic and agitated spirit that governs all theatrical manners, thought it was a concern of life and death, and that he was summoned to attend a sick bed.) And then, before the music had died away, appeared a vision—in a snowy dress—with long hair down on her shoulders, a gold fillet on her forehead, and her arms stretched out, with a smile of most bewitching and forgiving invitation. The rustics—gentle and simple—re-

marked a sort of haziness, almost spiritual, about this despairing vision—a softness, and at the same time a brilliancy—a mistiness of outline which seemed supernatural, and was certainly wanting in the ruder vision that had appeared before. They did not know that gauze had been cunningly stretched between them and the figures—which, it is notorious, has a surprising effect. Down sank the student slowly on his knees. The soft music rose and fell, the soft smile—was it of forgiveness or happiness?—played on that face, the arms wound in graceful attitudes—whispers went round, “Who? who is it?”

“Mrs. Lepell; don’t you know?”

“Fine creature—the accident;” and then from Lord John, “Egad—she does it uncommon well. She knows how to work those arms of hers. Egad, Ma’am, the stiff creatures of this town may take a lesson.”

The student had risen and sunk on one knee before this apparition. “Who are you,” he said, “that comes to disturb this miserable solitude? Leave me—leave me to my own troubles. Neither light nor comfort suit with this dreary heart. Leave me—I implore, leave me to darkness and misery; or if you be an angel that brings blessings, send me at least a quick deliverance, and hurry on the end that I sigh for.”

Applause—the music rises and falls dismally, being, in fact, the famous *tremolo ritournelle* to which the two unhappy Corsican gentlemen used to visit each other.

The vision shook its head. “No,” she said, sadly, “what you say is folly. Ah, why waste precious hours in misery? I have come to tell you it is the worst and most unacceptable homage you could pay to her whom you have lost. You are longing to meet her again. Ah, you know not what a waste of this morbid affection there is in the world. It would fill the ocean, while she, perhaps at this moment—the lost Lenore—may be tripping through the ball-room of the Elysian fields, sitting in a corner half-way up the stairs, with a handsomer spectre, carrying on a shadowy flirtation. Do you know, foolish man, that living or dead women are all the same? They

must live, and breathe, and flirt, or die ; and all the lost Lenores in the world, whom foolish men are frantically bewailing, are at this—consoling themselves in London or in Paris, in the parks or at the ball, or, perhaps, even in a *railway carriage hurrying here* from a foreign country—admiration is always welcome—always.”

And the vision stopped short with a smile, half encouraging, half satirical. There was loud applause, though we are bound to say it was not understood by the rustics.

Lord John was seen clapping his hands with enthusiasm : “ Bravo ! capital ! well put, Mrs. L. That’s one, two, for him—I didn’t think she could be so smart. Don’t you see she is touching up our young friend’s vanity *off the stage* ? She means that for a girl he’s after ! Egad, and I think he feels it too.”

The lover was indeed looking at his visitor, a little perplexed. He went on :

Severne.—“ I thought you were a messenger from heaven, with comfort and divine consolation ; but your comfort is of the world—worldly. It is tinged with a cold, unkind philosophy, which I do not care for. I have faith, and that is all I want.”

The vision with a burst of laughter.—“ So had Don Quixote in his windmills. How much you are to be envied, seeing angels everywhere, as you walk along, creatures bathed in golden light, models of perfection, while the prosy men and women about you only—see—men and women. Oh !” added the vision, in a feigned rapture, “ how charming is a child-like unsophistication ! how delightful a perpetual infancy, that is all its life *just eight years old*, and sitting in the front row, with its little fingery-pingery in its mouth, looking on at a pantomime !”

Even the rustics understood this, and laughed ; Lord John was in an ecstasy.

“ My Lord have mercy ! you saw that ! she’s given it to him, back and front, up and down, knocking the wind out of him ; my dear Ma’am, our young friend wanted a lesson.”

This was to the clergyman's wife, who was to send Captain Philips the cream.

"It is very clever," she said. "He has treated her badly in her life-time, and"—she stopped a little doubtful.

"Who, Ma'am?" said Lord John.

"The lost Lenore."

"The lost Foundling, Ma'am," said Lord John, contemptuously. "Pish! There, Ma'am, look; I declare he doesn't know what to say. The feller's dumbfounded. Suck your fingery-pingery. Ha! ha!" Severne had risen.

"If I was to choose," he said, "I would sooner be a child all my life, taking the pantomime for real angels and real gold and silver, than be one of the cold sect of philosophers to which *you, cold spectre*, belong. It is easy to laugh at everything, and I congratulate *you*, a happy spirit, on these fortunate gifts. You will flit over the earth, from city to city, from street to street, from house to house. A happy life is before you; you can visit a hundred moody, foolish sufferers like me, boys of thirty, and sitting at their first pantomime, and believing everything. Your mission may be to console them, by teaching them to feel the scenes, and show them that the gilding on the gingerbread is only tinsel. You will succeed of course with *some*. But I do not envy you your mission, *lovely* and incomparable spirit."

Mrs. Lcpell (assuming a wonderful expression of wounded sorrow, and drooping her head.)—"Ah! this is the way, always the way. Poor me, with the best intentions in the world! I came from paradise to console——"

Severne (scornfully).—"From *paradise*?"

Mrs. Lcpell (bending low).—"Poor me! again. Thanks for the charming compliment. Well, I must go back to one or other of *those two places*. Better, certainly, she did not come, if she has been filling up her hours of sorrow with the miserable distractions of society and flirtation"—(the spectre now assuming a very scoffing tone)—"I leave you the dear little boy, in his jacket and

frill, looking on at his pantomime. Sweet innocence—how charming, how delightful a picture—what a pastoral life—going to college—elected a member of parliament, and going into society, and all the time *a little boy*. Adieu, adieu! Will it not have its sugarstick, or will it tell its papa of the naughty unfeeling spectre that came to trouble him and make it cry, perhaps? Dry its eyes. It is, it is all real gold and silver. It is, indeed. Adieu!”—and with a scornful laugh the strange vision disappeared.

“By the Lord,” said Lord John, almost aloud; “she is one! how she gave it to him—turned him inside out. Did you ever hear such a scolding?” But to say the truth, the company were puzzled to know what it all meant. “It was uncommon clever, you know, but what was all that about the boy at a pantomime—a very smart creature—and she made him out rather a poor figure, you know.”

Sir John was greatly pleased, and understood it fairly. “Well, you see, Ma’am, she’s a very clever creature, and Harry and she are always at it. A little sparring, and I declare I think she sent *him* to the wall, Ma’am. As clever and deeply read a woman as you’d pick out. She’s now at work, Ma’am, on a fine book, good, old, solid reading, Bishop Digby—my ancestor’s ‘Short Way with the Dissenters’—I’m dying to hear her on it. I expect she’ll talk like a bishop.”

Mrs. Severne, the charming mother, looked disturbed and annoyed. She did not seem to enjoy it, like Sir John, and indeed it must be said that there was an indistinct impression abroad that, in Sir John’s phrase, “our friend there had cut rather a shy figure, you know.”

And while they were getting ready for the third piece, it was thus freely criticised.

Lady Hall, though, had seen some life in town, and took a kind of surprised and amused tone, which, it may be added, is a dangerous weapon if skilfully used.

“Really,” she said, “it is quite surprising, a *person* to be so much at home before such a crowd. I should faint.

It is so *unusual you know* to meet it. You can't get people generally to come forward in *that* way."

"Oh! she's very clever," said Sir John, in profound admiration; "knows the world so well."

"*So I should say,*" the lady answered, with a smile; "it's a great treat. I never saw such a thing before, and *so severe*, and ready with her sharp things. I must *take care not to quarrel with her.*"





CHAPTER XII.

FRESH ARRIVALS.

THE Barrister was now very busy behind "the scenes" (as it was complimentarily called, though there were no scenes properly,) getting ready "for *their* turn." To say the truth, he and Mr. Canby, and the Miss Fentons, pronounced that that last scene "rather hung fire, you see." It was rather too metaphysical; and that sort of thing didn't do for charades—all that "hair-splitting" and special pleading; you must have "business."

"Never mind," said the Barrister: "can't be helped—we must put our shoulders to the wheel, and stir 'em up this time. Look here, Canby; I've a capital notion, only just come into my head. I'm to come rushing in, carrying a jug of milk, and not see you, and come bolt against you, and then we must both tumble over together, and smash the jug—and you'll see how they'll roar. We had it at Lady Oysterman's, and thought they'd never stop laughin' "

The reader will, no doubt, have guessed the two syllables of this clever charade. "Inn" was, of course, the first, and a very little consideration will help them to the second. "It was uncommonly good," everyone said—Inn, the hotel, you know, and spectre, a ghost coming back from the other world. But how would they manage the "whole—Inspector?"

"Oh! my dear," said one country old lady; "leave

to *them*; they'll manage it, I warrant you, never fear; they're clever enough."

And this was the way they managed it—at a railway-station; *there* was an idea. It was the cleverest, *completest* thing "you ever saw in the whole course of your life." You'd just fancy you were walking into the waiting-room at Datchley, and the whole thing positively "knocked up," as Mr. Canby assured us, with his own lips, "in less than half an hour." But the secret is, you know, "you must have an eye for this sort of thing." You hit it off at once, or miss at once; whereas common bunglers, with all the painters and carpenters in the universe, and a whole month, would break down. Strictly speaking, there was nothing special; but it was the air of a station—everything was perfect, even to the newsman, who was done by the Barrister, who, indeed, did fifty characters, with a surprising versatility, and who called "*Times*, *Post*, *Telegraph*, and mornin' pipers"—observe "pipers,"—enough, as a country gentleman remarked, "to make you split." What shall be said when he came in as an elderly passenger, with a white hat, carrying a heap of luggage, which he dropped again and again, and had a dispute with a porter? "Now, that was as like what you'd hear on the platform as you could guess." But what was this to his sudden change? When he came on again, having merely turned up the collar of his coat and painted on a number, he was there utterly changed—an inspector, with the hall-bell in his hand, and calling, "Take your seats, please; now then, tickets, please; passengers for London, Liverpool, and the Bilberry Junction. Take your seats." The capital he made out of this feat was, indeed, surprising; the vivacity—the constant current of conversation, or rather monologue, he kept up was extraordinary. Indeed, Mr. Canby, who had laboriously got himself up in a porter's dress, had at times to remonstrate under his breath—"Oh! I say, confound it, do give a fellow a chance, you know." But this chance Mr. Canby never got. He had not that readiness which is born of constant practice; although he had, with great toil in his own

chamber, elaborated some jests about "buffers" and "bilers," which did not get the fair play they ought to have had, and were overborne by the obstreperous raillery of the Barrister——, who, as the applause rose, grew more and more grasping—almost forgot his partners—gave no time for a word in reply, and carried the whole thing through on his own shoulders. He was everything and everywhere, and in the grand *mêlée* which wound it up, when the passengers, all growing riotous, crowded round the "Inspector" in a perfect Babel of tongues, nothing could be happier than the speech he made them—all impromptu, of course—and nothing could be neater than the allusion to the Hall at the end :

"My head's quite goin'," said the Barrister ; "there's about fifty parcels and 'ampers inside, d'rected to Sir John Digby. Oh ! Digby. Ah, there's a man for you, a true gent ! Ladies and gents, I've dined there *once or twice*" (great laughter ; a country gentleman explains to his wife—"Capital. You know he dines there every day,") — "and you never saw such 'ospitality. A splendid fust-class engine that, Sir—good, solid, sound work—no tricks in him. Goes as steady as a rock ; and, ladies and gents, I hope that 'ere engine 'll continue to run on the Digby line for many and many a long year to come."

Could anything be neater or happier ? It was capital. It was hard to say whether the applause was for Sir John or for that clever Barrister, of whom the country gentleman again prophesied—"Mark my words, that young fellow will be on the bench yet."

The company now broke up. The soft tones of the harmonium were heard from behind the curtains ; Miss Fenton had run to it under a happy inspiration, swelling out our noble National Anthem, which "makes every true Briton's heart beat, Sir ;" and, it might be added, is recognised by those who have not a note of music in their constitution. On the harmonium, however, it became a little hard to distinguish from the Old Hundredth.

They poured out of "The Theatre"—so we may call

it still, slight compliment enough after such labours. There was to be a supper in the small dining-room; and here was Captain Philips very fresh and in good humour, after a short nap and a tranquillising smoke—"for once in his life he had got a fair cigar at the moment he wanted it"—and he was now well inclined for "his" supper.

The guests were really delighted. "I assure you, I have seen worse at a London Theatre." "I can tell you, that young man would make his fortune on the boards." Happy young man, who had thus no less than two careers before him, and the very highest places in those careers.

There was to be a sort of dance after the supper. The young Barrister came down modestly among the crowd, and was followed wonderingly by many rustic eyes. "There he is," he heard many times as he passed. "Look, my dear." He was just like you or me, or any one else. It is only weak natures that are overset by triumphs of this sort.

"Oh! you are very good to say so, just a little thing knocked up in half an hour. If one had had time, you know. But, I must say, we pulled through very fairly."

There, too, were the Miss Fentons, who had kept on their dress of office, the charming barmaid, for whom rustic youths sighed, and to whom they were introduced with hot cheeks and much confusion. Captain Philips sauntered about with an air of amused tolerance.

"I am sure it was all very grand. I can take your word for it. It was, of course, the finest thing ever done on any stage. Our friend there, of course distinguished himself. The Lord Chancellor will hear of it, and make him Attorney-General. Between you and me, this is the worst ordered house I ever was in—not Sir John's fault, of course. But, I bet you half a sovereign, those beasts of servants have supper cooling on the table, and don't think it worth their while to come and tell us, I suppose, jabbering over this tomfoolery."

The Captain was quite right, for in all matters con-

nected with the table, he had an instinct that was almost certainty.

But for the charming vision who had been so witty, so piquant, and—though the gauze had such an air of divine spirituality—the graceful creature, who had played, with such a just title to the part, the comforter from the skies—hers was the real triumph of the night. She shrank from wearing that graceful white robe, with the gold edging, as entailing *almost too great a publicity*.

“*Don’t ask me*, please,” she said, almost piteously. “I *don’t* like ; and after all he said and did. Oh, I must have lost my head.” Well, surely we could compound the matter—concede something ; and it was agreed that the head-dress—the gold fillet and the hair down on the shoulders, should be retained, as a concession to public feeling. How the rustic eyes followed her as she walked through the crowd on *Sir John’s arm*.

“You did it really very well, Ma’am—so uncommon ready ; and you touched *him* up nicely. It made me laugh. I assure you a month of that sort of thing will do him—good training, you know—teach him to put down those infernal flippant Radicals.”

“Ah, Sir John, what praise ! You overpower me ! It’s too kind of you ! But *he* ! Oh, Sir John, I am so sorry I did it, for *he* will never forgive me—never.”

“Tut, tut,” said Sir John, in high good humour ; “to be sure he will. And he *shall*, too. Let us go and find him now. Tell me now, where did you pick it up ? For to tell you the truth, I didn’t believe, you know——”

“Exactly, Sir John. I didn’t think myself. I suppose,” said she, a little slyly, and putting back the long hair ; “I was reading, Sir John, a chapter of your Bishop, just before dinner ; and I believe I must have caught up some of his *smart capital* style——”

Sir John stopped to laugh loudly. “Oh, good, good, good,” he said. “What ! reading ‘The Short Way ?’ I knew you’d like it. Very good indeed. I am glad of this. And so you picked up those smart things from the Bishop, eh ? Sly of you though.”

“Oh, it was delightful, Sir John. So funny, too.”

Sir John became grave and almost discomposed.

"I mean so lively and severe. Do you remember, Sir John, where he says how dreadful Dissenters are? Now let me remember the exact words. Yes—'The very Black Beetles of Sedition that creep, yea and crawl, over this fair land of England.' Is not that good, Sir John?"

"Oh, fine, fine," answered Sir John, "and how you pick it up—how *very good!* the Black Beetles—so they are."

"Oh, and again, Sir John—let me think," she went on putting her hand to her forehead to recollect. "Ah, yes, where he says that those who would introduce forms, you know, Sir John, and ceremonies into our holy churches, they do remind me of those young sparks in our civil train bands, who ape the air and bearing of His Majesty's troops."

Sir John looked at her with wonder. "She has it by heart," he cried. "Upon my word you delight and surprise me, Ma'am. I tell you what I'll do; I'll write to London to-morrow morning, and you must let me get you down a little present. I must gratify myself in this—not a word. I'll just write to Johnson, a smart fellow in Piccadilly, and make him hunt high and low, and scour London for a copy of the Bishop; and you must leave me your address, and he'll send it; but it's very scarce."

We may conceive how gratifying was this to our heroine. The Bishop *was* scarce, and "untold gold," according to Sir John. She thought for the moment, though, from the manner and form of words used, that it was to have been an ornament, or some such vulgar decoration. Disappointed; no——

And here was Severne. "Come here, Sir," said Sir John, in high good humour. "Come, Sir, show yourself to this lady. She's done you a world of good already."

Mrs. Lepell shrank away. "Oh, he will not speak to me, and no wonder. I lost my head. I did indeed. I forgot what I was about, and said such things."

There was an air of vexation about Severne, mixed with an attempt at good humour. "Good gracious!"

said he, "how—why? Surely it was all fun. You had the best of it, certainly; but then, to tell you the truth, I was taken by surprise."

"*Indeed* I saw that," she said, sadly, "as well you might be. Oh, some wicked spirit came and took possession of me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Sir John, "then I can tell you what that was. Only think, my boy, that was all the Bishop."

"The Bishop!" said Severne, in wonder.

"The Bishop's doing. 'The Short Way,' my friend; she's full of it. Has it by heart. Can say it backwards. Can't be kept from it—say that, Ma'am, about the black beetles for him."

"Oh, that's it," said Severne, with a strange look in his eyes, and in perfect good humour now. "Dear me, so *that* explains it. Devouring the Bishop! 'The Short Way'—ha, ha!"

Mrs. Lepell put aside her hair, and looked at him with that calm steady gaze of misunderstanding, which she sometimes used on such occasions. "No," she said, shaking her head, "I can't follow. He laughs at me for reading serious books. Sir John, *I am sure at this moment he thinks I am pretending*. And yet I would put this book into his hand this moment, and let him examine me as they do at Oxford. Is there any crime in us poor women reading these serious books? As the poor Bishop said, we poor women are in the militia, Sir John, and I suppose Mr. Severne thinks we are aping the line."

Sir John nearly fell down with laughter at this clever turn. "Oh, now you may give up, Harry," he said: "you can't do it, you know. She's too much for you—there, Mrs. Lepell, go with him and get your supper comfortably. There's roast wild duck down here. I must look after my Lady Hall."

There was a pause. Severne gave her his arm.

"Sir John is right," he said; "you are too much for me. The fact I confess at once. I am all out. I am a mere babe in judging."

Mrs. Lepell looked round nervously. "Now," said she, "I can speak. And oh! I was longing to speak to you quietly, and without anyone being by."

"Oh, goodness, why should you think of that?" he said. "Much more to the point. Here we are at the ducks. Will you have a wing?"

"Anything—any part," said she, in the same hopeless tone, and holding out her plate. "You don't understand me," she said, "as you say, most truly; and it is most natural you should not. I don't expect anyone to take the trouble. Why should I? But I merely wanted to explain. You thought I was forward, unfeminine, smart, flippant, and all *the* rest of it. You did, I know. I saw it in your face."

"That most expressive face."

"Well, yes," she said, calmly, "if you like; but I merely want to explain, and we shall not say anything more after this; *and you can believe me or not, as you please.*"

"Oh, dear me," he said. "Why, this is the play going on still."

"Yes, believe me or not, as you please. You don't believe me about that book of Sir John's. You know you don't. I can't help *that*. But I wish to say this—I assure you, when I stepped upon that stage to-night, I no more meant to speak in that way—and I say this from my heart—than I—than I——"

Severne waited a moment. "That form is always hard to finish," he said, smiling, "unless, indeed, you can bring in that something unborn, who has done such duty before now——"

Other guests at the supper were looking at her almost Pagan figure, the fillet and the long hair, and the tragedy-carnestness in her eyes. He saw she was a little put out at his coldness and *wit*, and was pleased.

"Just let me finish then," she answered, "and you can make fun of me then as much as you like. When I stood there, everything came rushing on me—*your manifest dislike* to me from the first——"

"Goodness, Mrs. Lepell!"

"Yes ; let me finish—your repugnance to let me into the house, a mere wanderer, an adventuress, perhaps—though recollect, *Sir John knows all our family*. Your making me an object for that keen wit which Mr. Severne means later to treat the House of Commons to, and those little whispers about poor me, and my reading 'The Short Way,' which is one of kind Sir John's most natural hobbies—I say I thought of all this at that single moment, and I could not resist trying, you know, Mr. Severne, in my weak way, to make some little defence. I was very absurd, and very foolish, and very pert and arrogant—whatever you like—and I can only beg pardon very humbly."

And a portly gentleman, in a white waistcoat, with a plate in his hand which he was trying to get rid of over somebody's shoulder, saw the brilliant lady whom he had so admired on the stage, with a suppliant expression, and her hands put together in an attitude of prayer.

"Good gracious !" said Severne. "Nonsense ! now don't. Why you make too much of everything. I wanted to turn you out of the house ! Nothing of the kind. As you ask me, I do say I don't quite believe in your frantic enthusiasm for 'The Short Way.' But now, admit I am not to be in the best and most favourable of humours, after the public attack you made upon me, which, however, I don't complain of, as I brought it on myself."

"Very well," said Mrs. Lepell, hastily ; "let us say no more ; you have humiliated me in addition by making me ask pardon. That fat gentleman going away saw me. No matter. It is another lesson. Let us be on the old terms until I go, at least."

"What do you call the old terms ?" he said, much interested, "a kind of half-and-half toleration—neither war nor peace ?"

"Give me a little of that duck, please," said she, very pleasantly ; "away with sentiment. No, I prefer war. No half-and-half measures with me. It must be war or peace, Mr. Severne. So make up your mind."

He paused.

"Do you know," said he, "and forgive me for saying it, that you are a very extraordinary person?"

"Another compliment," said she, smiling. "Could you get me a little wine, Mr. Severne?"

"I mean," he said, hastily, "an out-of-the-way character—one that you don't meet every day."

"A crime?" said Mrs. Lepell.

"No," he said, gravely. "As for war; no, of course not, or rather—let me think it over."

"There's Lord John," said she, eagerly. "*He's* my friend! Ah, Lord John, I saw you applauding—it was very good of you!"

"It was," replied Lord John. "Come with me now, and take a turn round the place, I want to talk to you. You have done enough to *him*! Here, take this arm."

"Delighted, Lord John," she said, and putting her plate into Severne's hand, went off eagerly, leaving him a little astonished.

"I am quite pleased with you, you know," said his Lordship; "you're an uncommon gamesome creature, and the way you dressed up that lad delighted me."

"Everybody is telling me this, Lord John," she said, with a look of pain, "and I can't make it out. Surely it was only a play."

"Oh, Mrs. Innocence," he said, laying his finger to his nose; "that does well enough for the soft ones. Oh, you're a deep little sharp-shooter; you were not brought up on gruel and weak tea."

"Now, Lord John," she said, gravely, "none of *these* freedoms. I had to scold you to-day, recollect."

"Oh, my dear!" said Lord John, putting on a low bass voice, highly comical "of course—of course, to be sure, I kiss the rod that smites me, and a very nice rod it is—eh?"

Mrs. Lepell took no notice of this.

"Who are you, now?" said Lord John, in a gay, airy way (he had been obliged to oil his throat all that night. He felt, he said, as if he was in a flour mill). "Confide in me—in 'Pappa Johnny,' as some young friends of mine in Paris used to call me. It was very pretty to hear

them trying the English in an infantine way—‘Pap-pa Jeanny;’ all tricks, you know, but it was very nice. Come, tell me now about yourself. Where do you come from? Who are you? There has been some little fun in your life, my dear girl. Better out with it at once. By the Jingo, that’ll come for me one of these days in a black coach with sulphur and brimstone—I’ll make it out for myself. Now I’m serious; I give you fair warning, my little child.”

Mrs. Lepell drew her arm away quickly, and looked at him courageously.

“I am sure you are not in earnest, Lord John. You could not speak in that way to anyone, if you were serious. Speak so, Sir, if you like, to the creatures you taught to call you ‘Pappa Johnny;’ but not to an English lady, whose helpless husband lies sick up stairs, unable to protect her.”

Lord John dropped back in a sort of convulsion of delight, and caught at the wall. “If she goes on, she’ll kill me! This goes beyond all the beyonds! Why, you beat Pappa Johnny to sticks. You’d sew us all in a sack, before I could say ‘Jack Robinson.’ Well, I won’t worry you; but, hang it, why can’t you gratify a curious and engaging young creature like me? You see, my dear, I wouldn’t for the world pry into female history—the Lord forbid and guard us!” added his Lordship, in a chanting tone; “but, you see, the way is, I know every man, woman, and child on God’s earth for the last twenty years—every soldier, horse and foot—every Jack traveller, man and child—men of all kinds, shapes, sizes, and classes; and women—well, hem;—no matter about that (see how nice I’m behaving—I’ll be saved yet, my dear). Well, now, knowing all this, and with such opportunity—why, the what’s-his-name himself, my master—ahem!—must be in it, if the story doesn’t get to me in some way of itself, without my moving a limb or stirring a hand. *Don’t you see that, my dear? Think it over.* As it is, I have put two and two together already.”

He paused. A little trouble and uncertainty came into her face, and her eyes fell upon the ground. Lord John

smiled and winked to himself. They were walking along one of the long galleries that ran round the house, and were coming into the hall.

"Why, what in the name of gluttony," said Lord John, "is all this about? Trunks coming in, and women's trunks, too. Ask Pappa Johnny to tell you the difference. Who is running from the bailiffs now? More company coming to gorge. God help the host. My dear, I congratulate you, heart and soul, body and bones. You'll be top-sawyer in this house, if you play your cards well. Why, old Sir John there, you'll twist him about your thumb like a bit of black ribbon; and as for that donkey, Severne, you rolled his nose in the mud. Well, well, my dear; but I forgot our poor, poor helpless husband lying up stairs, Sir. '*You dare not do it, Sir!*' Capital! Ha, ha! You'll be all right here, my dear;—here's more, I declare. Here they come, after their trunks! Duncan, who in the name of Satan is coming in now?"

Duncan answered, as if this was the correct form by which servants of quality should be addressed—"The ladies, Sir, that have been expected—Mrs. Palmer, Sir."

"Good again," said Lord John. "I must have a good stare at them as they come in. *Would* you, Sir?"—this to a stout gentleman, and lady as stout, who were coming from "their" supper in great good humour.

Through the open hall-door came a rather tall and slight lady, sweeping the oak hall with a large Indian shawl. Behind her walked timidly a young girl, tall also, with black hair and rather brilliant cheeks. The wondering company, idle, and listeners—stopped to stare, and almost made a sort of lane.

Duncan came to Lord John:

"Would you, my Lord," he said—"I can't find Mr. Severne or Sir John—would you speak to the ladies, Sir, while I run and look?"

"All right," said Lord John, and again with a "*Will* you, my good Sir?" to the stout gentleman in front, was making towards the two ladies, who were standing irresolute. Suddenly Lord John drew back and turned

away sharply. "By the Immortal!" he said. "What the devil——!"

He drew away Mrs. Lepell, and walked down the gallery, smiling and muttering to himself, "God Almighty, after *that*—among decent women, too!"

Mrs. Lepell wondered. "You know them, Lord John?" she asked.

He did not hear her, and was smiling to himself. "Well! well!" Then he suddenly stopped and released his arm. "My dear woman," he said, "you know the road—on as straight as a whip. Follow that nice little nose of yours. I've something to do—letters to write, of course."

He left her there; but he was wrong. She did *not* know the road; and now, here was Severne hurrying down from the other end.

"I have lost my way," she said, smiling, "and Lord John has very unhandsomely——"

"Did you hear they had come?" he asked, hastily. "Which way? Where are they—in the hall? Quick! Ah, I see," and he was gone in a moment.

And a charming little speech about "our reconciliation" perished on her lips. She was annoyed by these two ungallant desertions; and, indeed, she saw that Severne was now possessed with but one thought—the brilliant creature (for Mrs. Lepell had to own this to herself) who had arrived that night.

But already it was breaking up. The carriages were galloping on the gravel. There was a crowd of fluttering figures in the hall. There were the heartiest and most *grateful* good-byes. The young Barrister is shawling, or rather, to use his own droll phrase, "opera-cloaking" a young lady; and we can see one of the stout gentlemen of the country speak to him.

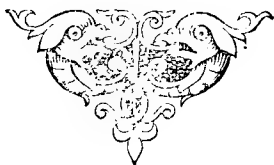
"My name is Barrow, Sir. You delighted me, Sir. Excuse me, but if you are down here again, hope you will look in at Barrowcliff. We shall see you on the woolsack yet, Sir."

"You do me proud, Sir," the young man answered, in a pleasant and humorous way; "and when I am sitting

in the House, if you have any little *case*, we'll manage it, and coach it through ;" and the young advocate laid his finger to his nose with infinite humour.

"Ha, ha ! very good, Sir."

And going home in the carriage, he entertained "his ladies" with an account of the interview. It was a very pleasant night indeed. It was known that there were two "new ladies" arrived, but they had gone straight to their rooms.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW GUESTS.

AT breakfast, the next morning, everyone was looking anxiously for the new arrivals. They were a little late, and came in with Severne, who introduced them in a perfect flutter.

Mrs. Palmer had a firm, steady face, with glossy black hair, laid very flat to her forehead, which gave her an almost "hard" look. Her eyes were quick, and periodically travelled from face to face. The flat, black hair she often smoothed, during which operation she did not droop her eyes, as some may do ; but peeped through her fingers as if they were chinks—at least, Lord John was heard to vow to his God that he had caught her very often.

But more troubled and restless eyes were bent on the daughter. The Miss Fentons looked at her askance, and with suspicion. This gorgeousness of colour, brilliancy of eyes—so wonderful—were dangerous. When she spoke, her voice was like a stream of music ; but she kept so tranquil and composed and unexcited, that a gleam of hope came to them, and they began secretly and joyfully to entertain the idea that she was a girl who could only fall into attitudes, and "look pretty." We must recollect that these poor Fentons, like the little Arabs and "codgers" of the street, had their wits prematurely sharpened, and were trained never to lose a chance.

Mrs. Palmer, the mamma, was a "comfortable woman," and eat with great heartiness—speaking as she went on:

"This is most kind of you, Sir John Digby," she said, "and we are so glad to see Mr. Severne strong again. We had some very pleasant weeks when he was with us. We can only stay a couple of days, Sir John, and must pack up our camp-kettles on the day after to-morrow—mind, dear, you have notice."

Mrs. Lepell caught Captain Philips' eye, and smiled at him—perhaps an incredulous smile. Mrs. Palmer saw it, and went on quite calmly.

"We knew a very witty Frenchman," she said, "Baron Molé, who had been an envoy in Italy, who said that vampires were all fables and nonsense; but that the *real* vampire was the guest that was going every day, but remained every day. What was that story he told us, dear, of the French Countess that got thrown from her horse at his palace-door, and was convalescent every night in time for dinner, but had a relapse every morning, and stayed six weeks altogether?"

This anecdote—accidental, no doubt—came in very awkwardly; but did not make Mrs. Palmer feel awkward.

"Would you be kind enough?" she said to Mrs. Lepell across the table, "just that clotted cream near you. Captain Philips has been praising it so——"

This was given like an order; and Mrs. Lepell, in some haste, dropped the knife, &c., off the plate.

Now entered Lord John. "You have left a trifle, I hope, for a hungry man. Aint I early, eh? I'll save my soul, my boy—cold pheasant, yes—save my soul and be sitting in Paradise yet, with a crown on my head, when all the bishops are howling. Mrs. L., there's room next you, I see—down *here*, I mean—ha, ha!"

"I say," said Sir John, "you see we have new friends—Mrs. Palmer, Lord John Raby—Miss Palmer, Lord John."

Both ladies bowed with ceremony. Lord John nodded to Mrs. Palmer, but stared at Miss Palmer.

"I saw *you* come in last night," he said to her. "Funny time to arrive, wasn't it? with the fiddles scraping like all the cats in——ahem!——broke loose. What did you take us for?"

The young lady looked at him gravely and with a repulsion so unconcealed, that, as was evident to all round, it made his Lordship blush a little.

"Are we Tonga Islanders?" said he, rather wickedly, "or have I seven heads? Will you count 'em, please? How you do look at me! What's the matter, now?"

The colour came to the young lady's face very fiercely.

"I did not understand your allusion," she said. "It is, as you say, the language of the Tonga Islanders to me."

"My dear!" said her mother with warning; then in a whisper to Lord John—"She is so impulsive—flames up at the least word."

Severne had just come in and stood at the door, listening. There was great delight, and almost pride in his face—as, indeed, Mrs. Lepell and Lord John saw.

Lord John said nothing, but turned to his neighbour—"Look at *him*," he said. "Just look at his soft sucking looks of love. There'll be fine work by-and-by, mark me. He's taken it hot and strong, he has."

That day, however, was a day of departures. Captain Philips was "obliged to go." If he remained, as he told Lord John, in what was little better than an open shed, he might as well take to his bed; as it was, among them all, with their passages and infernal baronial nonsense, they had left him the beginnings of a lumbago for next spring.

"Take my advice," he said to Sir John, "and *do* get the thing modernised—these passages cut up, and double doors everywhere. Of course it's no affair of mine, but they'll be bringing in man-slaughter against you, if you don't mind, one of these fine mornings. I've had a knife down my back ever since I came."

Sir John never knew how to answer this cool officer, though he did not like his tone.

"Not offended, I hope," said Philips. "You know it aint my affair *now*. If every guest you had were bellowing with rheumatics, of course that would be their own business. Good-bye! Now, driver, don't dawdle, but touch up your cattle well."

The Dean went also; so did the young officer who had caused such uneasiness in the shooting to Captain Philips. Selby remained for "one more day," though he had fixed on going.

"You may as well," was Sir John's sincere, though careless invitation. "There's no one for your room, and we shall be glad to have you, Sir—so please yourself."

But the fact was, Mrs. Lepell had met him in the corridor which had been so fatally "draughty" to Captain Philips.

"Are you *sorry*, Mr. Selby," she said, with grief, "at *leaving* us?"

"Yes," he had said, nervously, "I have been here too long. I am not wanted. I must go. No one will miss me?"

This was put as a question.

"Oh, yes," answered she, gravely, "*I* shall. I tell you so, Mr. Selby. And I would like you to stay—I really would. You are one of my friends—a very small circle, recollect—so I like to keep them about me."

Her look was so open, and there was such candour in this avowal, that Selby was hardly pleased. He would have preferred less speech and more confusion.

"I should like to remain," he said, irresolutely.

"Good-bye, then, if you must go," said Mrs. Lepell, whose eyes had been wandering down restlessly to the end of the gallery. "I hope we shall see you again some of these days—good-bye."

"I should *like* to stay," said Selby, wistfully.

"Stay then," she said, with a little air of mystery and confidence which was always very becoming to her. "Take my advice. There"—and she was

gone. Who ever was waiting, was, no doubt, impatient.

Mr. Selby, of course, remained.

"Well, Sir John," he said, "I should *like* to stay, you know."

"All right," said Sir John, coolly. "Then tell Duncan not to have the carriage round."

At lunch that day they all met again. The ladies were present. Miss Palmer seemed every moment to be growing in confidence. She talked in her low, musical voice, on subjects above the common level, with an enthusiasm that was not pedantic, and made everyone listen. Even her phrases and choice of words were more or less exaggerated: and yet it was an exaggeration that seemed only refreshingly quaint. A little sneer, or contradiction, only "warmed her up," as Lord John said; and she "put down" that nobleman more than once in a very effective way.

Mrs. Lepell was silent, and looked at her with surprise—not unnaturally, lifting her eyebrows at this forwardness in one so young. She was sitting next Sir John.

"What do you think of her—confidentially, you know?" said he.

Mrs. Lepell looked at him slyly. "May I tell you?" she asked, a little timorously.

"Certainly, Ma'am," he said.

"Well, then, Sir John, she reminds me of what a certain writer once said—a little wickedly—of a terrible man that flourished long ago. 'His tongue seemeth to caper hard against his mind, but leaveth the latter-named in the ditch.'"

Sir John laughed. "Not bad," he said; "but where did you pick that up, Ma'am?"

"Where would you think, Sir John?" and the eyes fell demurely.

Suddenly Sir John burst out with a laugh of delight. "What! not in the Bishop, eh? You don't say so. Famous—capital! Oh, I must tell *that*! The tongue capering up to the mind, and leaving the whole lot in the

ditch. Now that you do say it," added Sir John, listening to Miss Palmer, "it hits our young friend off exactly. Oh, after lunch, you must come into the study and show me the very place; and we'll get down the Bishop and have a good, long hour's study at him."

Mrs. Lepell shook her head. "As for finding *that*," she said, "it is a very big folio, recollect, Sir John. Just turning over the leaves my eye fell on the passage."

Afterwards, Sir John put on his spectacles, and took the book on his knees, as if it was a child; and searched every page, but never could find the remark. It was a pity, for many visitors were deprived of the correct shape of "one of the *best* things you ever heard in the whole course of your life. The soul and body cutting capers together and tumbling into a ditch!"

As he was laughing over this, and Lord John was growling to his neighbour that it was only one of the old two-penny-halfpenny jokes, a servant came in with a letter, and said that a man on horseback was waiting to take back an answer. Sir John turned it over again and again, and laid it down on the table while he got out his glasses.

"Why," said he, "it's from old George Lee! Did he say Mr. Lee had come back?"

"Yes, Sir; came back last night."

"Phew! what's in the wind now?" said Sir John, reading. "I declare——" he stopped and read. "Here, Duncan, get out the phaeton and pair, and tell the man I'll be over as soon as he is. What can be up? George Lee down from London, when I thought he was speaking to the House of Commons for his country—wants to see me on particular business. Says he's not quite himself. D'y'e hear, Harry?—I'm going over to Lee-field—what d'y'e say to that, Sir?"

Severne, whispering in a low voice to Miss Palmer, started. "Mr. Lee down here," he said. "What can he want?"

"Never mind, Sir," said Sir John, rising. "We'll see to-night. Don't wait dinner for me, if I don't turn up at

seven. I have my suspicions—but no matter. All in good time, my boy. I declare, fancy Lee sending for me !”

Sir John was gone, in good spirits. Severne looked after him with a little disquiet.

“Who is this Mr. Lee?” asked Mrs. Lepell, softly.

“Member for the county,” said Lord John. “Hot and strong. Tory—rank to a degree—knock you down—butcher every Whig in the country. No wonder the Baronet runs to him.”

“I must go now,” said Mrs. Lepell. “Nurse is wanted;” and then went up to her sick husband.

He was much better that morning, and there were hopes of “getting him” down for a walk in the sun, or, perhaps, an easy drive along the smooth avenue. Nurse went up to her duty.

Selby looked after her with deep and sad admiration, and said, “*There* was a faithful wife !” He never saw such *unobtrusive*, unostentatious devotion !

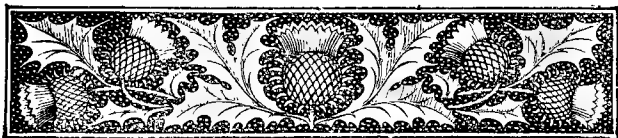
“Such unobtrusive, unostentatious devotion !” repeated Lord John, looking at him from foot to head. “*That’s* a good one ! I suppose that can be said of you, too. It’s like the knights, aint it? Soul of honour, and all that. Not daring to lift our eyes, you know, but still worshipping secretly and virtuously, eh? No harm in that; eh, my friend?”

The broad-shouldered young man coloured. “I never understand your jokes, Lord John,” he said; “and don’t care to be made the subject of them.”

Lord John turned on him at once. “Oh, don’t you?” he said. “But, my dear Knight Templar, *I* never consult people on the matter. I give you fair notice. If you wish to do battle for your divine ladye, then with all my heart. There’s the bowling-green behind ! Come ! No? My poor boy,” added his Lordship, soothing, “don’t let it be angry or too thin-skinned. I say, look at him,” said Lord John, laughing loudly and pointing to him. “I declare, if he aint in earnest. Look at his cheeks, I say ! Oh, by the Lord !—this is worth coming to Digby for !”

This was a malicious turn of his Lordship's, who was accustomed to fall thus savagely on anyone who crossed his humours. Selby was a little awkward, and stood there glowing, and literally not knowing how to answer.





CHAPTER XIV

A LONG DAY.

THE snow had begun to fall. About two hours later Mrs. Lepell came down looking for the party, or for some of them, but could not find them. The servant told her they were not out. She tried the various large galleries, but without success; and, wondering very much, was about going to the garden, when, as she passed the door of one of the small rooms, she thought she heard the sound of voices, or of a voice. It seemed to her—oddly enough—as if some one was reading prayers aloud for the household, like Sir John in the morning. She opened the door and saw a curious scene. A young girl, eager, excited, with flushing cheeks and flashing eyes, was standing up in the centre of the room, with a shawl draped about her very picturesquely. The whole company was sitting round, and as Mrs. Lepell entered somebody motioned to her with a hand, to get to a chair and make no noise. Lord John looked over at her, and patted the seat of one next him, into which she accordingly stole—but with some reluctance.

It was Miss Palmer reciting “Lady Clara Vere de Vere.” It had come about in the most natural way. Her mother had insisted, and she, knowing that delightful social truth, that nothing is worth “making a fuss about,” had consented, very naturally and without affectation, just to amuse them until the snow was over. It was really a dramatic performance, full of soul, and earnestness, and feeling, with a deep and mournful pathos in her voice

which touched them. Severne's face was turned towards her with delight ; Selby's was looking down with suspicion ; the mother's was full of pride. As soon as she was done there was loud applause.

"Bravo !" cried Lord John, aloud. "Rachel couldn't touch it." Then to Mrs. Lepell : "My dear lady, you have only come in time ; this girl is gradually taking the wind out of your—I mean out of all our sails. She's working up to be first fiddle here."

Mrs. Lepell bit her lips for a moment. Lord John watched her, then said, quietly :

"Well, after all, it's very much of the school-room, this sort of thing. You should stand up, my dear, and do *your* spouting-piece. You know what I mean ; and, between ourselves, I liked the way you put our friend yonder in the sack last night, fifty times better."

Then Miss Palmer was begged to give a little more, which she did in the same good-natured way.

She struck into the "Lament of a Jewess"—a poem about one of that tribe who had been wooed, and won, and deserted, by a Christian. It was written by "the Rev. Archer Longman," Canon of Middlesex, and was called :

"ESTHER.

"Thus far on my road—the place is nigh—
The wretched Jewess wanders back to die !
This is the spot, the grove, the little gate,
Where, of a summer eve, I used to wait,
Watching the dying sun, the netted trees.

* * * * *

"Where is the winding path—the shady wood——"

It went on in this strain for many lines. The way she crawled and crouched, the fierce defiance in her eye, the vengeance, the play of passions were surprising. There was loud applause.

"Egad, we'll be nowhere by-and-by," whispered Lord John. "That is, our side of the house ; but how long is this to go on ? Well, I have had enough to do me for three weeks ; she's gathered a million of cobwebs in my

throat, I can tell you," and his lordship rose and stretched himself.

"What did I tell you?" said Severne, coming round enthusiastically. "Did I say a word too much?"

Indeed, the performance had produced a profound impression; and Mrs. Lepell was left there standing without anyone having noticed her entrance. This is always an awkward and trying situation. She might not feel awkward, or have not a notion of a rivalry, but we know people *think* there is such a feeling in our hearts, and hence our awkwardness. Indeed, for the rest of that day Miss Palmer seemed to go about attended by a train, drawn after her by a sort of attraction.

Lord John snarled: "That young jack of a Severne seems to be her showman, like the waxwork fellow. I'll ask him why he don't get a wand and say, 'Observe the movement of the eyes. Please take notice of the graceful curve of the arms.' Ah, my dear girl" (Mrs. Lepell had long since found it useless to protest against this familiarity), "I'd like to describe *you* with a wand! What a showman I'd make! Ladies and gentlemen, observe that fine cheek, those round brilliant eyes, in—in which——"

"Now, Lord John, you are beginning——"

"In which, I say—don't interrupt—you can see the usual pupils, iris and all that sort of thing. Observe, I mean no compliment. Observe, too, that round, cozy little——"

Mrs. Lepell coloured. "I must go away, Lord John. I see you don't mind a word I say."

"With all my heart," he said, following. "I'll continue the description before these people. I know you'd like that better."

Mrs. Lepell turned back irresolutely.

"Oh, hang it," added his Lordship, stretching his arms, "what rubbish I talk! This is weary work, my dear."

Dinner hour arrived. They waited a quarter of an hour; then a second quarter, for Sir John; then sat down. They had a merry banquet. Still Miss Palmer

reigned. Mr. Selby had, by some providence, as it seemed to him, got next to Mrs. Lepell; but she was "in low spirits," she said. He was much put out of humour by Lord John, who was more lively than his wont, and gravely called him through dinner "King Arthur." "Ah, *you'd* like a 'Round Table,' my friend."

The evening wore on, and at last, about ten, the sounds of wheels were heard. Sir John came in joyously and triumphantly, and with pink cheeks, and in great excitement.

"Don't mind me," he said; "I am all right. I have dined, and dined well; and put in as good a day's work as ever was done. Leave sherry in the study, Duncan, and you, Severne, my dear boy, come with me. I have something to say to you, my lad, that will make you jump in your very boots."

Severne went out without saying a word, and without reflecting this joyful mood of his relation. All present wondered.

Lord John whispered to Mrs. Lepell: "I bet you there's something coming for our friend. I never saw the old man in this way before. He's as down as anything, did you see?"

By-and-by the company, after waiting with a curiosity that was pardonable enough, began to drop away to bed. Mrs. Palmer and her daughter remained; so did Mrs. Lepell. The latter lady said she never could bear to go to rest until midnight. Near that hour, at last came up Severne, with a troubled face and excited in his manner.

"I thought I should find you here alone," he said to the Palmers. "No matter; in the morning it will do."

A little wounded, Mrs. Lepell rose up without a word, and went to get her candle. He saw her look, and was filled with compunction. He ran to her.

"I did not mean that," he said; "indeed, no; but this is something that concerns *them* and *me*. You understand."

She laughed good-humouredly.

“Quite right,” she said. “I have no right to know your secrets. Good-night. Good-night, Mrs. Palmer.”

“Ah, you are angry,” said Severne. She went away without answering. Thus the day ended.





CHAPTER XV

AN EXPLOSION

NEXT morning were to be more departures. Lord John was to go that evening.

"I have ordered the trap," he said, at breakfast, "for five. You'll be all crying after me, won't you? Here's Mrs. Lepell been awake all night—to my certain knowledge."

But there was a little gloom on Severne's face. He was restless, and almost nervous; Sir John was very boisterous and in good spirits. Mrs. Lepell, no doubt, wondered what was this mystery. After breakfast was over she went up to her husband—to duty. No wonder Sir John said that a more faithful and dutiful and steady little wife he had never met, and with such good sound tastes. That woman was "well grounded" when she was young. We can guess pretty well the "sound" tastes to which he was alluding. When she came down again, she happened to look into the library, and in a moment Severne came hurrying through with his hat in his hand.

"Sir John not here?" he said, and was going away, but a soft voice called him back.

"Mr. Severne," she said, "I am afraid——"

"Afraid of what?" said he bluntly.

"Nothing!" she answered; "but will you forgive me? I hope there has been no bad news."

"Bad news!" he answered hastily. "What made you think of *that*? Wait though," he said, closing the door.

"Sir John says you are such a monument of sense, and perhaps—ah! Mrs. Lepell," he said, throwing himself into one of the great chairs, "I am in a miserable difficulty. I don't know what to do or where to turn to."

She went over to him very kindly, and sat down on the sofa opposite.

"I am *not* a monument of sense," she said, smiling, "as no one knows better than you. That is some of the old sarcasm. But if I can help by my little advice, indeed I shall try, and if sympathy and good-will can do anything—and perhaps a little sense—we might strike out something between us."

"You are good, after all," he said, eagerly, "and I shall stop all my nonsense. In a few words, then, do you know what has turned up since last night? That old Lee, who is our Conservative member—a wretched, narrow-minded, bigoted, ignorant old man, who thinks that 'the Glorious Constitution' means a slavery and oppression worthy of the worst days of Spain—this model man has found out that there is something wrong with his heart, and that the agitation of parliamentary life, or rather the disappointment at seeing concessions made to his fellow-subjects, is too exciting. He is going abroad, and is going to retire. Do you see anything now? It is hardly fair to ask you as yet—so——"

"He wishes you to take his place," Mrs. Lepell went on very readily and calmly, "and assumes that you will take up his principles. You would like his place and scorn his principles. Further, this old Tory has a daughter or niece, one out of a dozen, and Sir John wishes to fasten you into his principles by a good stout chain—of marriage?"

Severne looked at her wondering.

"You are extraordinary. Why, you have got the whole story. I was half an hour getting the Palmers to understand. My dear Mrs. Lepell, advise; say, what *you* would do? I have seen this coming for a long time. I knew it *must* come at last, and that I would have to face it. Sir John must have an answer to-day. Indeed, he wonders at the delay. But the truth is, as you have

guessed, this is not my way ; my principles are formed ; I will never be one of those vile old-fashioned Tories. I will starve first. I have been weak enough to keep all this from Sir John. You know what *his* views are. And now I see that there is a regular crash coming, and how am I to meet it ? ”

His head drooped, and he looked quite worn and dejected.

“ May I go on and guess again ? ” she went on, timidly. “ There is another difficulty, too. These Palmers, whom you met abroad—there is some entanglement——”

He looked a little confused.

“ My dear Mrs. Lepell, I may as well tell you everything ‘out of the face,’ as the Irish say. You guess wonderfully. Well, yes. There is something I *am* more or less—that is—what is the word ? ”

“ Committed,” Mrs. Lepell said, smiling ; “ that is what the worldly people would call it. There has been no time lost, I see. After all, it is a pity. Because these long engagements are so many weights and drawbacks, on a clever and brilliant young man, who has laid himself out to succeed with every advantage—it is hard enough, there is such competition ; but disadvantages make it harder ; still a handsome and clever girl—— But the thing now is, what is to be done ? What did that clever Mrs. Palmer say ? ”

“ Ah ! exactly ; and I just consulted them to see, you know. Miss Palmer was for the straightforward course, to go at once to Sir John. To tell everything boldly, and say that my mind was made up, that I would never sacrifice my principles, and all that. Now, what do *you* say ? ”

Mrs. Lepell remained silent.

“ Well,” he repeated, “ what do *you* say ? ”

“ What do you think ? ” she said, smiling ; “ are you inclined to adopt *their* advice ? It is the noblest and most chivalrous course.”

“ Ah ! exactly ; but——”

“ But a very simple one. It is one about which there can have been no difficulty from the beginning. You and

I, Mr. Severne, know very well, also, what will be the results of that course, which no doubt Miss Palmer, with her foreign education, did not see—and naturally did not see."

"No," said Severne, enthusiastically, "that is her charm. She is the most unworldly, unhackneyed, freshest creature this earth ever saw!"

"Well, then, I tell you," said Mrs. Lepell, bluntly, "if you go straight to Sir John with chivalry and plain-speaking, you must make up your mind to lose everything. This fine old place, your future seat in the House, fortune, success, life, everything. After all, a fresh and charming girl, as unsophisticated as we may imagine, is a real compensation; but the first thing is, you must choose between the two."

"Then *what* would you recommend?" said Severne, uneasily.

"Well, at the risk of being called sophisticated and worldly, and wanting *freshness*, I would say, take a middle course. First, is there not a way of subscribing the Thirty-nine Articles, with a reserve and a half sense? You sign them all nominally, but with a meaning of your own——"

"Nothing can be more base," said Severne, starting up—"more dishonourable. You would not have me *surely*——"

"Sign Articles?—certainly not," she said, calmly. "Were you thinking of *that* as a resource? No; what I meant was, that as politics stretch nowadays, and there are such colours and shadings, and gradations—such Liberal Conservatives and Conservative Liberals—I was thinking——"

"All cloaks for dishonesty, every one of them; so they are, as I live!"

"And so long as I live I should never ask you to adopt such a course! We only come back to this, however; if you go chivalrously to Sir John, I think you see, with me, it will be ruin—utter ruin. Now, forgive me for speaking freely. I do not think you are called on to adopt such a chivalrous and dangerous course. There is

no such hurry. We are not called on to abdicate all sense, and rush headlong on to destruction. We are allowed time to look about us. We do not live in the Middle Ages. You *are* not required to get up in the morning happy and full of hope, and go to bed that same night miserable and ruined. Would you be advised by me, a mere worldling, as you will call me, but one who has a sincere interest in your hopes, your welfare, and your success—in your natural ardour, and brilliancy, and enthusiasm? Let me advise you, now. Let us consult together—gain time—temporising a little, for a few weeks; and then see what is to be done. Suppose I speak to Sir John? I am rather a friend of his. There was some little use in ‘The Short Way,’ after all.”

“My dear Mrs. Lepell,” he said, warmly, “I think you have a great deal of sense and wisdom, which is *not* worldliness; and I see your views perfectly. And what is more, too, you have a great deal of forgiveness and good-nature, and are really heaping coals of fire on my head. Come, now, let us draw our chairs together and have a regular council.”

Before the sound of the castors of the chairs had died away they heard a rustle and looked up.

There was the glowing face—the flashing eye—looking down on them. There was a statuesque attitude, as of some indignant goddess; and there, on the lips, was a look of open scorn and indignation. Severne started up as if he had been rebuked.

“I have not heard anything,” said Miss Palmer, “beyond a single word; but that tells me what sort of advice this is. I say again, Mr. Severne, the straight course is the best and the noblest, and that I conjure you to take. It will be the best in the end. Have no secret scheming; I conjure you go straight to Sir John. Tell him your story, and he will like you the better for it. You must—you must do nothing else, no matter who attempts to persuade you!”

Both looked at her with wonder—Severne, perhaps, with a little confusion.

“I declare,” he said at last; “I believe you are right.

The straight course is the best always. Mrs. Lepell and I have been in council, and we were thinking that as Sir John is so hasty and excitable, though with as true a heart as ever Englishman had, that perhaps it might be better to wait. But, after all, if I know him at all, he would be more pleased by our going straight to him, and telling him all at once."

"Ah, I knew you would do what is right and noble," said the young girl, clasping her hands. "That dear Sir John will like and love you the better. Go, Severne; lose not a moment. He is in his study now. And I will answer for the result."

Severne started up. "It *does* seem like an inspiration," he said, eagerly. "I shall go at once. Mrs. Lepell, she is right, after all."

Mrs. Lepell merely shrugged her shoulders. "I have no right to interfere; but I have seen a little of the world, and I, too, have my secret convictions. If you ask me, I must tell you, you are going to commit a mistake. Wait even until to-night. Nothing can be compromised by that."

"No, no!" said Severne. "Let us have it over! by lunch, we shall be all talking happily together, and have it off our minds. A thousand thanks, my dear Mrs. L., for your kind advice. I know you meant it ever so kindly; but I think little worldly tactics would fail here. Come, dear," he said.

As they left the room the young girl flashed back at Mrs. Lepell, who was standing with her hands resting on a chair, what seemed a look of triumph. Mrs. Lepell only smiled. When they were gone she said aloud to herself, "half an hour, and we shall see."

She waited there very patiently. Suddenly the door was opened and Lord John looked in.

An idea seemed to flash on her suddenly. "Lord John," she said, "will you tell me something—as a great favour? You know you are going away."

"Not yet, my dear," said his Lordship, dropping into a chair. "Not just yet, my dear. My hour is not yet come. But now, what's this? What can I tell you, my

dear, that *you don't know, eh*—you innocent, guileless, unworldly little thing?”

“I want you to tell me very much,” she said, taking no notice of this compliment, “something about those new people—the Palmers. You know everything about everyone, and I am sure there is a little history about them.”

“And now what on earth are they to you, eh?” asked he. “Come!”

“Nothing in the world! what is anyone to me, except my husband?” said she, looking down; “but shall I confess, Lord John, I don't quite like them?”

“I don't like 'em either. The young one's a stuck-up thing; and I should like to see her get a lesson.”

“Oh, *you* could give her *that*,” she said. “She shrank from you at breakfast. She is so ready with her tongue.”

“Indeed I know 'em, as well as—that is, as I did—my old grandmother. There is not a man, woman, or child in the kingdom that I couldn't turn inside out if I chose! Bless you, I've seen the world. Mrs. P had better keep quiet, and regulate her young cub, who, I think, *we* seeis flying at good game. They won't be out of this, mark me, Ma'am, for a month yet. I know their trick, bless you, and what's more, could put a spoke—ay, half a dozen spokes—in their two-penny-halfpenny wheels, Ma'am.”

Lord John had, indeed, come fresh from Mrs. Hardcastle, who had the best cherry brandy “on the face of God's earth.” “Where is the whole pack now?” he asked.

“May I tell you a secret, Lord John?” she said, in a low voice. “*He*, Mr. Severne, is gone to tell Sir John that he is a Whig, or a Radical, and that he can't——”

“*What!*” said Lord John, starting up, “is the murder out at last? Has our friend to unkennel his fox? Oh, I knew it would come to this—I knew it would, and I always said so. Why, there'll be the most infernal Beelzebubian row that this house has ever seen, even when old Cromwell and his Quakers came down here—that is, my dear, if you believe *that* lie. Oh Lord, Lord!” and Lord

John rubbed his hands with delight. "I won't go till I see it out. It's worth staying for. My dear woman, there'll be fun—fun, don't you see? and I like a piece of fun. I declare I could just put my arms—ahem!—round that screen, I am so pleased. You are a great little woman, and I like you, I do indeed. There's a pluck and game of your own about you; and a spice of the What's-his-name in your eye——"

"Now, really, Lord John," she said gravely, "only that you are going away——"

"Fiddle-dee—on my grandmother's face. (Ah, we were all happy innocent children once; and eat our pudding with a sense of innocence—you know?) That won't make so much matter, for I won't lose sight of you, Mrs. L. Where are you in London, you smart, round-about—ahem!—cushion?—this cushion, Ma'am: ah, you won't catch me. Round it is, and no one can deny it." Mrs. Hardcastle's *liqueur* was mounting higher every moment. "Come out with it; where are you to be? you and poor Shadrach up stairs, or Abednego—whatever was his name? It's no use hiding it; for, by the living thingamy, I'll unearth you. I have been looking for you the last half hour, to tell you all this—only that woman Hardcastle got me into her den there."

"I don't know whether I ought to," she said gravely; "but as I know it is of no use to hide anything from you, I must tell. Well, Mr. Lepell has taken a house—a small house—number 75, Brooke Street."

"Mr. Lepell and I—ha, ha! that's not so bad—always awake! knowing, knowing little—ahem! Well, I'll drop in very, very often, if you behave—that is, mind, no forwardness—nothing to shock a mind of tender years, you know—*maxima debetur*, you know. Positively, if I hear a word likely to endanger my faith or morals, that moment I run out of the house."

Mrs. Lepell could not but laugh at this comic notion.

His Lordship laughed too.

"Yes, I'll come often—very often. When *he's put to bed* I'll drop in, and won't we have our cup of tea together—No. 75—I won't forget, I declare. I am sorry

to go off to-day, but I must. See here—perhaps, one of those evenings, when you are making a cup of tea for me at Brooke Street, I'll tell you about our friends ; a story, Ma'am, that will make that little figure of yours jump out of its arm-chair, eh? Egad, I must go and get all my traps together. I'll see you again, though." He went out, leaving Mrs. Lepell ruminating deeply. No one came for at least a quarter of an hour. Suddenly the door was opened, and Severne, pale, agitated, and miserable, strode in.

"It is all over," he said. "You were too right—God knows. Now, what is to be done?" He was very wild. "I can't stop now," he said. "It's all at an end—now and for ever. There's been a dreadful business. *You were right in what you said*, but I am not ashamed of what I have done. It's all over now, and I shall only see you for a few hours more."

"Why—tell me what is all this?" she said in alarm. "What has happened? Oh, I am so grieved."

"It is not your fault—quite the contrary—if I had listened to you—but I thought he was one of the fine old stock, that liked what they called 'manly candour' and hearty English straightforwardness. Ah!" said he, ruefully, "my manly candour has done for us, I am afraid. Still I am not sorry. There was but the one course for a man of honour."

"But something could be done," said Mrs. Lepell; "surely something. He is generous and good, though hasty, and that charming girl——"

He laughed. "The charming girl—and she *is* one—would be like a bit of scarlet cloth to him. He has just spoken to Mrs. Palmer in a way that we could not expect from him, a true country gentleman. He has forgotten his hospitality and politeness, I am afraid, and they are going away at once."

"This is all dreadful," said she, clasping her hands. "Who would have thought this?"

"Well, you did," said Severne, with a forced laugh. "You saw further than the wise man. No matter. I have done for myself. But we must all get rubs at some

time of our life. I am now free ; to tell you the truth, that state of even partial subservience was odious to me. I can now breathe and stretch my arms."

He did draw a long breath, and affected to stretch his arms, but not with the enjoyment that he professed—that simple operation did not seem fraught with such exquisite pleasure, or worth the price that had been paid for it.

Mrs. Lepell was left in a fit of abstraction—was she thinking how this convulsion would affect *her*?—when the door was hastily opened, and Sir John looked in.

His face was hot, and almost contorted. When he saw Mrs. Lepell alone there, he turned back and went out of the room, banging the door behind him. Then he found perhaps that he would have to walk round a long way, so he returned and came through once more. She saw him muttering, and his eyes fell on her with a fixed stare of unconsciousness.

"Sir John," she said, in a soft voice.

He stopped short before her. "Do you want anything?" he said rudely. "Then ring the bell, Ma'am. I have no time to talk. That fellow has destroyed me.—He has driven the blood up to my very head. A low, grovelling, mean-souled ostler—that's what he is. He hasn't a thought that's fit for a gentleman. On my soul, I believe he wants to kill me. But I'll take care he shan't!"

She ran to him, for Sir John had dropped into a chair helplessly.

"Do you know what the scoundrel has done? Do you know what he has been skulking through the house doing? It makes me ill to think of it. There is a strain across here, Ma'am. It seems I have been fattening and pampering a low plebeian Radical all this time. A low, illegitimate, sneaking Whig, that would level us all down to the boors in the fields there, and cut up my land. Those are sweet pretty principles to have under my roof! But they shan't stay there an hour longer, not one of 'em—not a day longer. He shan't have a cut at my land in any way. He may go among the rabble if he likes, and stir them up to come and mob me and stone me—as I suppose he will! But out of this he packs. And on the

top of all, a marriage, no less, with a creature that he has picked out of a French catty or a bullyvar. My God Almighty," said he, starting up, "that all this should have come on me in a day ! *Il y*, they'll point at me all over the country. I'm disgraced—disgraced, Ma'am—and, curse me !—I beg your pardon for the swearing before you—if I don't go down to my grave without forgiving it."

"But, Sir," said the lady, "I am sure it can be explained ; he may have been hasty."

"I don't care," said the Baronet ; "let him. He has chosen, and he may stay so. It's not that. It's the low, ungentlemanly, systematic hoodwinking and deception that has gone on for years. Shamming a good Tory, he and that soft mother of his : and all this time I have been pampering and petting a ruffian that will cut all our throats on some morning and divide our property. It's horrible—base and horrible—and infernal cruel and ungrateful too, though that's the least. For I was always kind and indulgent. But, thank God, I've found him out in time, and before I made my will too. I am glad of that. I'll set about it in the morning, and the lowest charity school shall have every stick in the place before it shall go to him, or near him ;" and exhausted by this denunciation, Sir John sank again into a chair, and sat there staring wildly. "Now, not a word for him : I won't listen to it—not a word now," he said, starting up again and leaving the room.

Mrs. Lepell was aghast, and sat there long wondering at this mysterious change. Afar off she heard the series of doors "banging," as the angry lord of the house went his way to his study. Servants came by and looked in with gloom and doubt on their faces, for in a surprisingly short space of time it had spread through the house that there had been "a hawful blow up" between Sir John and his nephew. It seemed as though there had been a death in the house.

Never were there such gloomy hours.

Severne came back later, and found Mrs. Lepell in the same place.

"This is life," he said dismally. "However, I was quite prepared for all this. I knew it was coming, and was ready to go through the consequences. I am very glad it has come. It was a degrading position to be in, and it has been hanging over me like a weight. I am now free. Thank Heaven, I can carry out my own principles, and carry out my promises, independent and unshackled. I shall work my own way and my own fortunes at the Bar, or in any other opening."

"Would it not be better," said Mrs. Lepell gently, "without, of course, any sacrifice of principle—to temporise, not to be in quite such a hurry? Nothing is gained by haste—nothing is lost by delay. You might wait until to-morrow, or say you would consider the matter."

"And would not that be temporising and truckling, Mrs. Lepell?" he said. "No, no! I don't think you mean that. I cannot sacrifice my principles, even a hair's-breadth."





CHAPTER XVI.

BREAK-UP.

DUNCAN was that day recollected at Digby. Duncan, the serving-man, told what he had seen and heard to the little community—with some more, perhaps, which his instinct furnished him.

“Sir John be wus than I have ever known him in my life.”

This was at the lower ladies’ and gentlemen’s table, when they were dining at two o’clock. Duncan, Sir John’s “hown man,” the butler, and Mrs. Hardcastle, with another select menial or two, were taking that meal together.

“Markt my words, Mrs. ’Ardcastle, if something won’t bust on us before long. Severne’s been doin’ something that’s worked him. Markt my words”—this was a phrase which Mr. Duncan heard a Conservative Member—who was auguring the downfall of England—use very often, and it seemed to him very “fine”—“Markt my here words, all this ’ill bust afore long, but it ’ll clear the hair—clear the hair” (another phrase also used by the Member). “He’s a packing at this moment,” went on Mr. Duncan, “not the ’eavy things, you know—they’d fill chests,—but merely the pus’nal necessities—throwing a few indispensables into a portmanteur. I know what all that means, Mrs. ’Ardcastle. As for Sir John, he’s a filing against the bars of his cage, in a hopeous condition. I pity him, I do. As for Severne, he’s aimerbelt enough,

but, as I said all along, wants ballus—wants ballus sadly.”

Mrs. Hardcastle, still discussing the crisis, thought darkly it was all along of the “prankering” woman up stairs, who was scheming the whole house into mischief. “An artful, obskewer person, as no one knew where she come from, or where she’d go to, respectably.” She must say, must Mrs. Hardcastle, that she *were* surprised at Sir John taking in persons of *that* sort, off the road, as it were, and she knew at the time—nay, had she not distinctly prophesied it the first day?—that no good would come of it. But here Mr. Duncan must “reerly” interpose. He could not coincide in that harsh view. He was a man of the world, was Duncan, and had travelled with the young Lord Tipton to a great capital called “Parse,” where—as Duncan often told—they had remained a fortnight at the “Hotel Mirreyboo,” in the “Plarse Vaughandum,” and he considered Mrs. Lepell to be a “fine woman,” on the French pattern, and genteel on the whole. To say the truth, our heroine, who had a surprising instinct in reading off the humours and prejudices of those about her, had correctly interpreted the feelings of that gentleman, and wishing no doubt to conciliate all his little offices in favour of the poor helpless invalid up stairs, had paid him special attention. The result was frequent discussions at table between the superior ladies and gentlemen down stairs, in which much female acerbity was displayed, and in which Mr. Duncan, as a travelled man of the world, and confessing to a weakness for “fine women,” was “constreened,” as he called it, to range himself on the side of Mrs. Lepell.

He had, indeed, happily described the miserable state of things up stairs. It was indeed the longest day ever known at Digby ; it seemed actually to trail by. Those who were in the house, when long after they looked back to these days, could only recall a weary fevered “day before execution,” with a vision every now and then of a strained old man’s face, with staring eyes, and flaming cheeks, which every now and again burst out upon them from

some door, and withdrew again, after some frantic ravings. Mrs. Lepell saw many of these visions. It flashed out also, very unexpectedly, on the two strange ladies, who had arrived so recently. He was passing through the room, as usual, when his eye fell on them.

"What are you doing here, women?" he said, stopping short, and looking from one to the other. "Why aren't you with *him*—why don't you give him some more of your *French* instructions—eh?"

The ladies looked frightened. "I don't understand, Sir John," the elder answered, with dignity.

"Don't you, then?" answered he, in one of his bursts of fury: "I do then! You have made up a nice game between ye, a nice plot—catching a boy out in a foreign country, when he's sick and helpless; not that I care one d——" and Sir John caught himself in time; "you're welcome to him now, Ma'am—the whole right and title of him, and can take him with you when and where you like. The French game hasn't quite answered, you see."

"Mamma," said the young girl, rising, "I think Sir John Digby forgets—and is doing us great injustice. Let us go away."

Sir John tried hard to sneer.

"Oh, very good—very good, and very cool. More of the French! I don't forget. Of course I am a boor, and you or any of *his* friends can tell me anything. I don't profess to command words, Ma'am. I have always been accustomed to speak plainly; and if I am blunt, I have provocation for it. It's a shame—a crying, infernal shame, and I tell you so plainly—interfering in families in your French Jesuitical way, for it is interfering. If you only knew how I have looked to, and built on this low fellow to do something for the family, and for the country, which is going to ruin—and it may now, as soon as it likes, for it is not worth saving—I say, if you only knew—but you *did* know, Ma'am—what I had laid out for this fellow; a seat ready for him to walk into; a family that was proud to have him, not for *his* sake—don't think so—but for mine, Ma'am; that would have

made him a gentleman, which he's not (and he may go to the poorhouse if he likes), and if you knew what Lord Buryshaft said to me—and he'll be in the Government by-and-by. Why, we could have had a PEERAGE, Ma'am! and I had the title ready settled on, and all; and *you* come here—*you* and your——. Why, it's enough to drive a man stark staring out of his wits. What d'y'e mean by it? What, in the devil's name," went on the poor Baronet, now very wildly indeed, and losing all restraint, "brought you here on that infernal night? Did I do you any injury in all my life—did I, I say?"

"Sir John Digby," said the lady, with great dignity, "I can make great allowance for your feelings. I will say nothing of the way you have spoken to us—scarcely becoming an English gentleman, or suitable to ladies from any country, *even* France. When you are cooler you will do us justice, and find that we have nothing to do with this unfortunate business. Mr. Severne is a free agent. He is able to judge for himself."

"I don't believe it, Ma'am," said Sir John, in a wild fury. "I don't care to mince words with *you*. It's all folly to be going on with politeness and such stuff. You put him up to it—set him up to it—you know you did."

"I say again," said Mrs. Palmer, "I can make all allowances and pass this by; but I repeat, you do us injustice. You impute to us behaviour of which neither I nor my daughter are conscious. We did what we could, in a little way, for Mr. Severne. Of course, I make nothing of *that*—it was what any Christian ought to have done. It was *he* who asked us here, who *forced* us here. He assured us of a kind and a polite welcome."

"Oh, of course," said Sir John, with eyes wandering from one to the other. "And you received it, Ma'am, I hope, eh? This is an English gentleman's house, Ma'am; and it's owner knows how to treat ladies and gentlemen, and you might have stayed here on and

on and on again, until your dying day, and done as you liked. But when I caught you tampering and plotting with d——d low French arts, stirring *him* up——”

“I repeat,” said Mrs. Palmer, haughtily, “we did nothing of the kind, neither I nor my daughter.”

“Neither you nor your daughter, Ma’am,” repeated Sir John, with a rueful sneer. “Of course not. I’ll believe that of her, of course.”

“I did, mamma,” said the young girl, with her eyes upon the ground. “I confess it openly. I advised him to the manly, honourable course, not to sacrifice his principles or the happiness of his life to interest or money.” •

“You hear her,” almost shouted Sir John. “This is infernal impudence! She boasts and brags of it!” He stamped with rage. “It’s a conspiracy—a low Jesuit conspiracy! Go away, go along! Out of my sight! Don’t come near me. Don’t let me see you. Infernal brazen effrontery? I’m in a nice way,” he added piteously. “They own it! A nice gang I’ve let in on myself. God help me! But go now, both of you. Pack—without an hour’s delay, or the servants shall——”

“Our things *are* ready,” said Mrs. Palmer, calmly, “and the chaise has been ordered an hour ago. We entered this house on *your* invitation, and we leave it of our own motion after a day or so’s hospitality. The obligation is not *very* great.”

He could hardly speak; but pointed to the door.

Again Mr. Duncan, much excited, brought down news to the superior sitting-room below of every stage of the business.

“There’s a fly ordered from the Lion,” he said, “for the French ones. They have got their kongœ,” said Mr. Duncan, pleasantly. In due time the “fly” came, and he was at his duties, which he discharged respectfully; but came down to the saloon below full of warm encomiums, as to their being “ladies,” and that he knew it from the first, and was now sorry that they had got their kongœ.

By-and-by came another departure: very pale and very agitated, Severne came down. *His* packing had not taken long; yet he had on a fine Roman manner, and a bearing of pride and excitement. Mrs. Severne, whom Sir John had unreasonably included in his condemnation, was going away also. She was quite overwhelmed by this sudden turn, for her whole heart was in the advancement of her son, which up to that morning she had looked on as securely and as finally settled as though he had been born heir to all the estate and title of Digby. She flitted about the house quite helpless, not able to speak or make any effort to avert what was coming on them.

"We are all ready now," said Severne to Mrs. Lepell, "to be ejected. Who would have thought it would have come to this yesterday? Not that I care so much. I am a free man now, and *can stretch my arms*" (this was to be his favourite idea). "The slavery was getting intolerable. Though it *is* a little mortifying to be drummed out — eh? — and before these people below, who I suppose know all about it—eh? They have a wonderful instinct these creatures—eh?" He put these questions in a restless way. "What a world it is!" he went on, impatiently; "to think of our being so pleasant and happy yesterday, and all turned upside down now. Not, mind, that I regret it a moment; for to be a man you must be free—have your own responsibility. I can breathe and stretch out my arms now, which I could not do before. Ah! but the problem now is, how are we to keep those arms strong and healthy? *I* really don't see the way at this moment; and these poor Palmers miles away I suppose by this."

She gave a little stamp. "I *never* can forgive them," she said impatiently. "Now they are gone I can speak of them freely. *They* brought all this mischief about. *They* hurried on things, when a little time would have saved everything—cold, unfeeling, selfish foreigners."

"No, no," said Severne, "I think not. They meant well."

"Ah, yes," said she, still impatiently, "that is your generosity. But the fact remains behind—meaning well or ill, *they have destroyed you*. I can never think of them with patience. We had a charming house here—we were all so happy, and getting to be so happy; we were beginning to know each other—to like each other; the days were running by so charmingly. *That* night when we had our little battle was one of the happiest I ever knew. A charming party. To look back, it seems like fairy-land. And yet on that night *they* come, and destroy all. They plant themselves—this woman and her daughter—in our happy community, like two Upas trees, and destroy all."

Severne was silent, and looked ruefully on the ground. This picture seemed to him a little faithful. For a moment he did not speak, when the door suddenly opened. They started. The inflamed wild face of Sir John looked in. It saw who was there and was withdrawn.

"Poor, poor Sir John," said Severne, bitterly, "it goes to my heart—his look shocks me. If I go to him and say something—I will," he added, starting up.

Mrs. Lepell caught his arm. "No," she said, "be advised by me. Leave it to time—to a little time. This is a very bad moment."

"You are wrong. I can see he is suffering. Yes, it is an inspiration. He likes me in his heart. He cannot snap asunder the ties of years in *that* rude and summary way. Yes, this is the moment."

"No, no," said she yet more eagerly. "You will ruin all. Leave it to your friends who stay after you. I conjure you, do this."

Again the door opened, and Sir John stamped in.

"This is my own house, you will leave me some corner of it?" he said. "I am not to be skulking from my own rooms because other people choose to stay. It is not quite come to *that* as yet."

With an uncontrollable impulse Severne, seeing the old face worn and inflamed, ran to him and took his arm.

"Dear, dear Sir," he said, "this is all cruel. We

must not leave each other in this way. It has been a mistake all through. I love you, and always have loved you, and I know in your heart you still like me with all my follies; and I am sure everything can be explained and arranged, and if you will only bear with me for a little, and make allowance, we need not push matters to——”

Sir John looked at him for a moment, speechless, then dashed away Severne's hand.

“Why d—n your impudence and your infernal airs! What do you speak to me for, Sir? ‘You need not push matters.’ Needn't you? Curse your heart, what d'ye mean? How dare you talk to me in that way, with your free-and-easy airs! Get out of this — out of my house where you have feasted, and fattened, and been made too much of, you ungrateful, low, beggarly, ill-conditioned, unfeeling, damned ——. I beg your pardon, Ma'am, I do indeed,” added poor Sir John, his face working. “I forget my manners, but I am forgetting everything with this mean, whining fellow, that you see would now be under my feet to get back to his place—*his place*, Ma'am, for he has been living on *me* all this time. You *have*, my genteel fellow. He might have been in the street but for me. Yes, you would, you low mean plebeian, you, that — mark my words — will die in a ditch yet! What d'ye stay here for, Sir, in my house? Didn't I tell you to take yourself off? Go — quick; you poison the air! I want no Jacobins or levellers here, and you *were* one all this time,” added Sir John, speaking with a slow bitterness, “you sneaking, deceitful, ungentlemanly fellow. Look here — look at this. I am glad you are not gone, for I wanted you to see this. And you look too, Ma'am, and be witness — you know what this is; and you, too, Ma'am—look! look!” And with great trembling and tugging he got out a large parchment bundle, thick, and tied up with green ribbon, and looking like a deed. “It is not long ago,” he went on, “since this was done. It took a very long time, and cost a good deal too, but I shan't be long

getting rid of it. There—there—there—that settles *that*, Mr. Severne!” And with a knife which was on the table he cut and hewed the bundle of parchment across again and again, as if it was a piece of wood, until it lay on the ground in ribbons. These he gathered up with fingers that trembled, and thrust into the fire. Then looked at Severne with a sort of triumph.

Severne stood there, pale and agitated too. He knew perfectly what this meant. For this destruction seemed to be a sort of final and irrevocable ceremony, which brought home to him—never with so much force until that moment—the palpable fact of his disgrace. At that moment he felt that it was all over; and Sir John standing before him, and looking at him, saw that. There was triumph in his eye.

“You haven’t thrust me into my coffin yet,” he said, “you and your levelling gang. And you and they may come as soon as you like *now*. It’ll not do you much good.”

Severne could say nothing. He was quite crushed.

“Now begin to whine :—‘Now, now, don’t go on this way.’ How *dare* you! Curse your impudence! Not a shilling; not twopence-half-penny, Sir!” went on Sir John; “and you little know what I had done for you in that—that thing. Ah! you ungrateful, low Jacobite—Jacobin! you had always the bad drop in you, and they told me so, and I didn’t believe ’em.”

Mrs. Lepell went forward to him suppliantly.

“Oh, Sir John, Sir John,” she said, “this is all dreadful; it is terrible, that things should have come to this.”

“And who brought them to this?” said he, turning sharply on her. “It’s my own, thank God, every stick and stone in this place; and I bless my stars that I have lived to keep him out of it. What are you staying for, Sir? I thought you had some pride in you still. I wouldn’t wait to be turned out of a house. I suppose the company you keep have taken that out of you.”

Severne coloured, but said nothing. He turned to go. He was quite overwhelmed, speechless, crushed, by the savage vindictiveness of the other. Sir John looked after

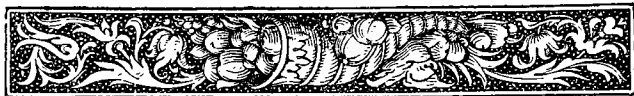
him with a sort of triumph. At that moment entered Duncan, who announced, with all respect due to dignity in adversity—

“Things is all in, Sir.”

Severne bowed to Sir John, and turned to go. Mrs. Lepell ran to him at the door, and whispered—

“Keep up hope; you leave a friend behind who will work for you.”





CHAPTER XVII.

SIR JOHN GOES HOME.

THE house was now all but deserted. The Lepells alone remained ; and they had fixed to go next morning. Mr. Lepell was infinitely better, though he did not come down.

What remained of the day was oppressive. Sir John had again retired into his den, and was not to be seen. The air seemed charged with gloom, as though it were the day before the funeral ; and yet it cannot be said that one in so awkward a position as the guest spent it sorrowfully or found it dull. She went out to get some fresh air in the grounds, in the unrivalled old English gardens, and got a bit of bread from Mr. Duncan "to feed the fish." Indeed that gentleman insisted on carrying it out himself on a plate, and spoke very feelingly and confidentially of the late events.

It was most dishasterous, he said, and one of the most awkerd countertongs that had ever occurred. Observe, he hadn't a word to say against Mr. Severne, who had always behaved to him pussonally in a gentlemanly and feelin' manner ; and a more impartial witness might say that never had Severne been more "like a gentleman" than at his leave-taking. "The whole thing was most peenful," Mr. Duncan added, "to any looker on with feelings." He wouldn't like to pass through it again : and he feared looking Mrs. Lepell in the face ; "the britch was now past all accommodation." Mrs. Lepell feared so too. These jars in families, Mr. Duncan

thought, were always so painful. However, it would do Sir John good; he was always better for "a fill-up." Mrs. Lepell was not a-goin' too? "I hope we'ent a-goin' to lose *you*, Ma'am?" went on Mr. Duncan, with a gallant smile. "We should look back to this 'ere unfortunet business with a double vexation, if it were to deprive us of *hall* of our guests. I 'ope not."

Our Mrs. Lepell answered this kind wish with much good humour, and said, with a sigh—

"I grieve to say we have to go to-morrow morning, Mr. Duncan. I am sorry for it; we have been very pleasant here: and to go away at such a moment in such confusion is very bad."

"'Tis fearful," said Mr. Duncan, reflectively. "But you must come to us again, Mrs. Lepell. Sir John 'll be lookin' out for you one of these mornins. We shall miss you, indeed. And I assure you, speaking from my 'art now, that night when you did the ch'ardes"—did Mr. Duncan mean the little plays they had given?—"it was, reerly now, a thing to look back to; it were indeed. And you give it to him so well—reerly."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Duncan. I am very glad you were pleased. I assure you I value your praise highly. I am afraid I must go in now;" which she did.

In the drawing-room below stairs Mr. Duncan told the ladies and gentlemen of his own circle, with unconcealed exhilaration and, it is to be feared, not a too strict adherence to the truth, that "she'd asked him out into the garden. Fine woman; reerly, now; but for'ard—devilish for'ard."

The dinner that day was a very odd spectacle, only Sir John and Mrs. Lepell partaking of it. Sir John came down with the flushed cheeks and the troubled eyes searching suspiciously round the room, as if he were going to say—"Where the devil have you hid him? If he's skulking here——"

Mr. Duncan and the under-footman, the coachman and the boy, all waited with a superabundant pomp of attendance, just as usual when eighteen or twenty sat down. There was a delicacy, and almost tender, though sup-

pressed gallantry, in the manner of Mr. Duncan towards the lady; he waited on her himself, "pussonally" and exclusively; and once when the coachman, heavy and rustic in his motions, had changed Mrs. Lepell's plate, in what he believed to be the natural round of his duties, Mr. Duncan reproved him outside the door, with much heat, wishing to know what he meant by thrusting "hisself on ladies, like a beast, a smellin' o' 'osses, as he was;" a remark that brought on a very painful scene down stairs between the two gentlemen.

Sir John ate nothing, and scarcely spoke. Mrs. Lepell spoke a good deal, and with great art contrived to keep up a conversation in which she only was the speaker. Neither did she make little of the delicacies which Mr. Duncan took care to offer to her, for she had always a good appetite, and now merely seemed bound, as she kept up the conversation unassisted, to keep up also the meal itself, unassisted.

It was done at last, and she had fluttered away to the drawing-room, carrying out the fiction of "leaving the gentlemen to their wine." Leaving poor Sir John to his wine indeed! He sat there long, with the same glassful before him that he had filled when the cloth was taken away, and with his eyes fixed on the wainscot. He still sat on until very late, when, with a start, he rose up and stamped away to his study, with his now usual accompaniment of loud banging doors. Mr. Duncan finished, or rather began, the glass, sitting down in his master's chair to sip it. He accompanied it with a toast; need we say it was to "a fine woman?"

Mrs. Lepell sat in the drawing-room, a little restless. What could she be waiting for, or expecting—not surely what her generous female friends would have called "an old beau?" Towards ten, Sir John, restless also, came in with the same uneasy look in his eye. "I don't like being alone," he said, "though, indeed, I must now accustom myself to that nice pass they have brought me to! Now that we have a fine clear house, thank God! do you know, I feel the air clearer."

"Sit near the fire, Sir John," said Mrs. Lepell, in a

kind and cozy manner ; “ draw in your chair ; it’s a very cold night.”

“ I don’t find it so,” said he, “ they’ve warmed me enough for to-day. Do you know what I have been doing in the study?—writing an address.”

“ An address !” repeated she.

“ Yes ; an address. Don’t you know what that is?—it’s not seven heads !—Yes, an address to the electors. I must drag my old bones to the hustings. It’s a duty I owe to the poor country and to the county. I’ll stop the leak, and take care they don’t hand it over to some low scoundrel that will come and chop up our estates. That’s part of the game, Ma’am. I dare say it will kill me with all the fuss and noise ; but, after all, it’s in a good cause.” He paused and went on—“ That’s a nice spectacle at my time of life ! I haven’t strength for it, but I’ll go through with it if I drop down on the boards before them. I won’t let this old country be disgraced ; and I’ve money enough, too, to fight the battle. No weavers, or tailors, or spinners, shall get in here. At my time of life, with my poor old limbs, to be going through all this worry ! It’s infernal cruel—it’s cruel—I’ll never get through it.”

It was hard not to pity this ancient Conservative of the Old Guard. Mrs. Lepell, really moved, drew over softly, and took his hand.

“ Now, Sir John,” she said, bluntly, “ I’m not going to mind what you say a bit. But I tell you this one thing, scold me and abuse me as you like ; the whole of this, I am afraid, is a little your own fault.”

“ My fault, Ma’am ?” said Sir John, drawing away his hand—“ my fault, Ma’am ?”

“ Yes, your fault, Sir John,” she went on ; “ you have been too hasty in all this. I think so, indeed, and that’s my opinion, and I say it out, as I am going away to-morrow ; so I have no object, you see.” (Mrs. Lepell did not see there was some bad logic here.) “ You have been *very* hurried in this business—and I have been thinking it over all the night—and a little harsh.”

“ Why, Ma’am,” said Sir John, getting warm, “ what the——” suddenly he stopped.

"Well, you know how young he is—a mere boy—that has neither sense nor experience."

"Indeed he has not, nor grace either—never was a truer word."

"Men of that age," she went on hurriedly, and pleading very hard, "rarely know their own minds—they know nothing of the world—nothing absolutely. They are obstinate, and the more you reason with them the more you fix their pride."

"Well, Ma'am," said Sir John, with a sort of suspicious surprise, "and what's all this coming to? What the devil are you driving at now? What trick is in the wind? I tell you what, Mrs. ——"

"Sir John," said Mrs. Lepell, rising with great dignity, "I thought you belonged to the old *chivalrous* school, that set an example to our days. I can make every allowance for your trials; but still I think I owe something to myself, for you have been kind to me and I feel kind to you, and that it is better for me to—go to bed."

Sir John was confused.

"Why do you take me up so, Ma'am? I can't speak by the card. Haven't I reason to be sweet tempered to-day, and you can make no allowance? But who does for an old man like me, God help us! I didn't mean—I——"

"Not a word, dear Sir John," she said, with delight, "not a syllable more. It was, indeed, I—I am touchy, and only meant to say that I thought you were a little hurried; that if you had given Mr. Severne a little time he would have reflected—seen what he was losing, and decided wisely. Now his pride is touched."

"And let it be," said Sir John, vindictively. "But what did I do? Why d'ye say I did it? Didn't he go away himself? Did I turn him out? Who asked him to go? God knows he might have stayed here as long as he liked, or if he wanted time to think, of course, anything in reason. Though would you have me take in a pair of beggars, like that woman and her child, off the street—eh, Ma'am?—is that what you are at?"

"They!" said Mrs. Lepell, with great contempt. "I'd

have had them taken by the shoulders the first night they entered this house, and packed back into their chaise again. They were common people out of the street. I said that openly, and made no secret of it. It was the most foolish, mad idea in the world. You were quite right, Sir John, to send them out—*pack* them out.”

“I was—I know I was,” said he. “I’m glad I did it, too.”

“I know a little of human nature,” went on Mrs. Lepell, a little mysteriously. “The sight of them will always be associated with the loss of all his hopes and prospects. In a week he will be disgusted with *her*. Don’t you see? Therefore I say, Sir John, don’t—don’t be hasty. Don’t be hard on an unfortunate, foolish youth, who is no wiser than others of his age.”

Sir John paused. There was something in this. Suddenly he burst out again :

“It’s not that, Ma’am. As for marrying, I should not so much mind *that* if he got a virtuous well-conducted young woman ; and, of course, with good, *sound* connections ; but it’s not *that*. Was I to put up with a damned pestilential Radical under my —— to have a fellow breathing his vile doctrines under my roof, corrupting my servants, and teaching them to cut our throats? Never—never, Ma’am ; I won’t have it—never !”

“There again, you are wrong, too, dear Sir John,” said she, firmly, “and I take the liberty of telling you so. All young men are that way *at first*. Was not the great Mr. Pitt so, Sir John, when he was a young man?” (where did Mrs. Lepell learn *that* bit of history?) “So was—was Eldon? and so was”—(she could not recall any more instances, and put it generally)—“so were hundreds more. It would have worn off, Sir John. These are mere childish fancies, and should be treated like a child’s. You are a man of the world, Sir John, and have met all sorts of men. I declare I am a little angry with you, though I know I shall make you angry with me for saying so, for the county has lost a capital candidate, and a capital marriage, which would have kept the place and the property.”

Sir John looked down. This view had not struck him.

"That is all very well. How am I to know these things?" he said. "I only take fellows as I find 'em. I am too old to begin arguing with, and waiting on boys. Though it does break my heart to think of the old place, that I know and recollect these sixty-five years, every day of it, being broken and going to rack and ruin. For I won't let the *other* Digbys in—no, I'm not come to *that*. Fine fashionable London people, Ma'am, that would pull down every stick of these old rooms and build a plaster villa."

"Ah! do think it over again, Sir John—night brings counsel, you know. Instead of misery you will have happiness once more. Indeed I am principally thinking of *you*, Sir John, and of the certain unhappiness that will come into this dear house. I speak disinterestedly, for we shall be far away to-morrow, and may never see you again, Sir John, or—talk over 'The Short Way.'"

Something like a rueful smile came to Sir John's face.

"Indeed, no, Ma'am, you must not leave us yet. I am greatly obliged to you, for this sort of talk is a comfort to me. Of course I can be just and make allowance, Ma'am, and if the fellow is sincerely sorry, and recants his errors—fully, Ma'am, mind, and no casuistical reserve, Ma'am—and comes back and says he will do everything, why, why——"

"Thank you, thank you, Sir John," she cried. "How kind, how generous, how forgiving. Oh, this, indeed, is noble. But then, Sir John—ah! think of what you did to-day so very hastily. Stern justice, certainly, which I fear can't be recalled."

"Ah!" said Sir John, with satisfaction. "He felt *that*. I can do what I like with my own still. He saw that. It had a good effect on him, Ma'am, I think. He cowered under it. He thought he had some poor fogie to do with. It went home. Though as for that matter, between you and me, it doesn't make so much difference."

Mrs. Lepell looked up in astonishment.

"No difference, Sir John?"

"Why, not exactly," he said. "The fact is—I just thought of it—I have another in that drawer much to the same tune, Ma'am. There were some legacies which I wished to alter, and so I had another made—brand new. You're a sensible woman, Ma'am, and I admire you. I do, indeed. There's a good deal of what's rational in what you say. There's no such violent hurry after all. It's not life and death, eh, Ma'am? The gallows isn't waiting for us all to-morrow. We are not obliged to make up our minds in a second?"

"Exactly, Sir John," said she, humbly, "you put it in the right view. There is no such great hurry. He can be punished—cut off, as he deserves to be, a week or a fortnight hence all the same."

"So he can," said Sir John, moodily. "Of course I don't want to be unjust to any man, woman, or child. God knows we all want time for repentance—everyone of us, Ma'am. And there is little enough allowed to us. I don't want to be harsh with him. Let him make submission to me—if he likes. Let him fix any reasonable time he pleases to make up his mind in, and I am content. I am a gentleman—the old school they call it, ha!—and don't want to take anyone short, and I shall die a gentleman, I hope. They may call us—as the fashion now seems to be—stupid and mule-headed—nice and pretty language that, Ma'am; but we're not ashamed to do the right thing, and the gentlemanly thing; pay our way, Ma'am, which of course may be mule-headed and all that. Well, now—after all this—I'll go to bed, now, for to tell you the truth, I have gone through a great deal to-day; my head feels very weary, and I shall be glad of a good sleep."

"Good-night, then, Sir John," she said, taking his hand, warmly; "and you are not angry with me—poor me—for speaking so freely, and on a matter I had no business with?"

"Not at all, not at all, Ma'am," said he shortly. "Good-night." Then he went to the door. He came again, however, and said very warmly, "No, but I am *obliged* to you. I am, indeed. Do you know I have

been dreading this going to bed all day, and now I don't mind it at all. I feel lighter about the heart. For you know it was a miserable thing to look forward to—spending the rest of my old days alone and deserted. And with all my faults, my dear, I don't deserve it. I don't think I do. Though I have my sins and faults, I shall be very glad, indeed, if the foolish lad comes back, and he *shall* have every allowance. Of course I don't want him to be with my Lord Eldon and the like, for of course the times have changed a little, and we must go a little with them. But I am obliged to you. I am indeed, Madam, and you mustn't leave us just yet. And I assure you, you have given me a great deal of comfort to-night."

Then the figure of the old Baronet passed out. Mr. Duncan was waiting to light his candle for him. Mrs. Lepell was left behind in the library. She stayed there a long time by the fire; and Mr. Duncan, who came in on pretext of looking after the "winders," observed a smile of great pleasure on her face. At first he naturally put that down to his own presence, and made a light and pleasant remark, in reference to the relation between them, but Mrs. Lepell answered very abstractedly. She was thinking of other matters, and, utterly unconscious of his presence, went over to the writing-table and began a letter. By this proceeding she fell considerably in the affections of that officer. She was a "wurldlin'," he feared. The letter was to Severne, no doubt to tell him of the joyful news, and kind office she had done for him. She may have been a "wurldlin'," but still she found pleasure in this task. It was carefully written, and she took some time over it. By the time she rose to go to bed it was nearly one o'clock.

Somehow she also had found it a weary day. Like Sir John, agitation of any sort wearied her bodily frame. So she lay down to rest very pleasantly, perhaps saying her prayers, and taking credit in the daily account for the Samaritan office of reconciling a good but "mule-headed" old gentleman, and a "fine young man," perhaps as "mule-headed" in his particular way: and

musings on these events, she went off to sleep, and from sleep to dreams the most tranquil and complacent in the world. Perhaps she was building up a whole city of castles on this foundation, and most naturally too. To a young married woman, just launched in London, with an invalid husband, what an advantage in a young man of fortune, with ancestral honours, and reasonably bound to her by all the ties of honour and gratitude! Such a young man, well favoured, brilliant, and clever, would soon enter on a brilliant course, "cut his bright way through" into the "first circles"—oh! those gorgeous "first circles"—and where he led he surely could put out a kindly hand to show *her* the way; and perhaps then she would be on a level with the fine ladies who might have hitherto been a little *too* fine; perhaps then she would be seen at the "best houses," "taken up" by a dowager of rank, who would take her out, a charming, good, and pliant old dame, with whom she could go up stairs in the ball, whose name she would hear announced, and her own after it, shouted from menial to menial, shouted again and again, so frantically, so loud that——"

She had started up in bed, for she did hear her own name called again and again, through the door, while some one knocked violently. It flashed on her at once the house was on fire, and with a bound she was on the ground. It was Mr. Duncan's voice that she heard through the door. "Oh, git up, Ma'am," he said, "and tell us what we *are* to do. Poor Sir John, Mrs. Lepell, Ma'am——"

Mrs. Lepell's instinct helped her to the conclusion at once; there was no fire. Wait," she cried. "Mr. Duncan, I shall be ready in a moment," and with surprising rapidity had hurried on a dress. In a moment she opened the door.

"Is he very ill?" she asked; "have you sent for a doctor?"

"A man a-horseback have gone off. I sent him myself; but I fear indeed, Mrs. Lepell, Ma'am——" and Mr. Duncan shook his head.

"Goodness!" cried she, in real alarm. "What does

all this mean? Let me go to him," and she set off hurriedly along the corridors and passages which led to Sir John's room. But Mr. Duncan was up with her in a moment, and in the hall placed himself before her.

"No, Ma'am—Mrs. Lepell," he said, "it's better not for *you*—indeed no. I were in there myself; and I fear that the doctor, — oh, Ma'am, Mrs. Lepell," added Mr. Duncan, with some genuine feeling, "he was a very good gentleman, and kind to us all. I wish—I wish, Ma'am, he had not been quite so 'short' with Mr. 'Arold."

Mrs. Lepell stopped. She had a positive distaste, as indeed she often admitted, to "painful scenes." Sir John ill indeed—but dying—or dead—or in that mysterious, doubtful condition in which Duncan had shadowed him forth, she could not endure *that*. It was not more than half-past three; a light was burning here and there, for it was just the same as the dead of night. A herd of frightened women, whom the news had roused, half-dressed, flitted about, or gathered near the fatal chamber. It was whispered that the coachman, Wilkins, "was with Sir John"—that is to say, in the room with the living spirit that was Sir John Digby, or the earthly remnant which only deserved the title from courtesy.

It was very cold, and freezing hard outside. It seemed like the middle of the night, as indeed it was to all intents and purposes. Into the cold library, where the fire had long since smouldered out, Mrs. Lepell withdrew, and wrapping a black shawl about her, over her white dress, sat down in an arm-chair to wait for news. A single candle lit the room. She felt both sick and cold; for this being roused in the night "upsets" many. The others flitted about the house; the white crowd gathered upon the stairs and passages, yet no one had courage to resolve all doubts by going in to see the coachman who was with Sir John. They all carried out the sham—the fiction of clinging to the hope of the doctor coming. Ah! poor Sir John, how many hundred thousand fanciful miles is he away by this time; no earthly doctor, even though he be flogging his smart horse along, and

is at the gate, can ever overtake him now. He is long since at his journey's end, and knows secrets which neither Tory nor "vile Radical" can divine.

Mr. Duncan told the story very often and to several audiences during these moments of suspense. He had woke up ; he could not say why or wherefore—but then he was wakening and wakening, and then he heard Sir John's bell agoin' so, and agoin'. Then, as by some sort of "instink," he knew that something was wrong, and leaped up. In after life, and in other "services," he told the story very often, though he added another remarkable particular—that it was "a voice" that called suddenly and roused him.

But another sound was now heard—sounds of wheels were now heard through the night, and Mr. Duncan ran out to the hall, shading a candle with his hand. There was the doctor's gig, and the doctor himself, who had so cheerfully dined at Digby not many nights before, and who, going home that night, had vainly prophesied to Mrs. Doctor that "old Sir John was good for ten years to come." Mr. Duncan led him away without a word to the chamber of—to Sir John's—and from thence he came out in two minutes to the crowd of women, and the men from within and without, and from even the farm, a mile and a half off ; for news of this sort travels by some enchantment ; and he said to them in a low voice—

"My good people, I can do nothing here. We have all lost a dear, good, kind friend !"





CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NEW OWNER OF DIGBY.

SIR JOHN had been carried to his resting-place with all the pomp of squirearchal show—with the gentry in carriages and the tenantry, in a reckless display of scarfs, walking behind. One or two of the old servants, who had almost a morbid delight in such pageants, professed themselves more than satisfied with what had been done. The epitaph in everyone's mouth was, that he was "the last of the old stock"—a panegyric meant to imply condemnation of his successors—those London fashionable Digbys, who had come down to take possession, and who were, of course, heirs-at-law, as *no will had been found*. Sir John's solicitor had, indeed, announced confidently that there *was* such, that he had prepared it, and that, as of course, young Mr. Severne "came in;" but when he was told, with many "shakings of the head," of the quarrel on the day before Sir John's death and of the sudden expulsion of the young man, he saw at once how the matter stood, and wrote off at once to the new Sir Perkins Digby, than whom no one was more surprised at his own good fortune.

Sir Perkins, a dry and excellent public officer, had a salaried appointment in some Board; had been a working barrister, and from his labours on a commission had been made "C.B." He was a thorough "office man," and looked on all country life as a sort of barbarism, and on country gentlemen as more or less uncivilised.

His views, calmly expressed and enforced with much clever reasoning and official fluency, had excited the bitter animosity of his kinsman, who had often said that "no clerk or quill-driver should ever turn Digby into a counting-house." And the result was the carefully-prepared document "drawn" under the advice of counsel, and which was so hastily cut up by the angry Sir John, in presence of Mrs. Lepell.

All desks, private places, &c., had been thoroughly ransacked ; but the will which the solicitor had prepared could not be found. Sir John was a very "orderly man:" every paper was in its place ; the solicitor even knew the private spot where the will should lie. But, instead, there was only found the great blue legal envelope, labelled outside in Sir John's own writing, "MY WILL." As this was empty, it was clear he had destroyed it.

The lady and her husband had not yet gone when the new Sir Perkins came down. He arrived as if about to sit on a commission and make a report. He came, already in a deep black suit—though he had been telegraphed for, and had not time to order mourning, and yet it was a suit that shone and glistened as if newly come from the tailor's. Within ten minutes he had been "over the house," and had taken note of everything and of everybody. Within half an hour he had heard all particulars, and had everything in order in his own mind—with a list of witnesses to be examined—again just as if he had come down on a commission, and had to send in a report. From the first moment his eye had settled on Mrs. Lepell, with whom the late Baronet, it was known, had talked a great deal on the day of his death, with whom, it was known, he had dined, and with whom he had sat up a long time.

To her, then, came an early message, by one of the maids, that "*Sir Perkins'* compliments, and he would be obliged if she would step down for a moment to the study." She saw a middle-aged gentleman, very tall and pale, and with pale, straw-like whiskers.

"Take a chair, Mrs. Lepell," he said. "I hope you are not hurrying away, at least with any inconvenience to

yourself. There is plenty of time—plenty of time; and you must not think yourself the least in the way.”

She acknowledged these civilities very gratefully; but said they had really fixed to go that evening.

Sir Perkins then proceeded to dwell with conventional regret on the loss of his relative, whom, he said, was one of the excellent old school, now so rare, and so fast dying out of the country. “Happily” so fast, was what our intelligent lady read off in his expression.

“I, of course, did not know him so well” (“not at all,” she interpreted this speech); “for our paths lay in quite different grooves. In fact, I believe he had intended, through some little prejudices, wholly unreasonable, I must say now, against me, to make a different disposition of his estates to what he has done. Fortunately a better and more Christian spirit prevailed.”

Though Sir Perkins said this in narrative form, it seemed to take the shape of an interrogation. But Mrs. Lepell agreed with him ardently, and only said—

“Oh, Sir, he was *the best* of men!”

“Of course, of course,” said Sir Perkins. “But you saw a good deal of him before his death? Of course, at dinner and meal-times, everyone else having left the place, he must have been thrown in a good deal upon your company, and, of course, quite naturally, spoke out all his feelings? I am told, Mrs. Lepell, that you were a special favourite of his?”

Naturally she was a little discomposed by this allusion. After all that had passed—all *that scene* of the night before—no woman but must have been affected.

“He was only too partial to me,” she said. “His heart was in its right place, Sir Perkins. Those old trees—to have cut one of them down was, I believe, to have taken away his heart’s blood. And quite naturally; he was reared among them from his childhood.”

“Oh, yes, of course,” said Sir Perkins, impatiently; “that is all very well. But surely, you, a person of more than ordinary intelligence, must know that after a quarrel such as took place between him and his relation, he would scarcely be thinking of trees and his place: he

would have been excited, Ma'am ; he would have been full of but one subject, and could talk of nothing else. I know the world pretty well by this time, and have travelled over plenty of minds in my day. I have sat on many a commission, and know what must take place under given circumstances pretty well—oh, indeed, yes."

Sir Perkins, in fact, had talked himself into very complacent satisfaction with his own gifts.

There was a curious look in her eye—half amused, half mischievous—which his knowledge of human nature did not help him to see. He was, in fact, looking at the ceiling and smiling.

"Yes," he went on, "I can almost hear you and him talking, and can give you the very words almost. Sir John, most naturally displeased, said he must make an example of the person who had chosen to offend him, and take his own course ; that as the tree fell so it must lie, and all that ; that whatever he *had* intended or had arranged he would alter, or *had* altered now—eh, Mrs. Lepell?" And with some anxiety Sir Perkins looked at her, and waited for an answer.

She only said—

"How wonderful you are, Sir Perkins. What use such a gift must be to you in the world."

Sir Perkins crossed his legs impatiently.

"Surely you can't be *so slow*," he said testily. "You follow me, I know. I don't like moving in the dark here. You surely can recollect—being asked in this plain, unofficial way—what took place."

More mischief came into Mrs. Lepell's eyes.

"I shall never forget a word of it—of that dreadful day. Poor, poor Sir John !"

"Ah, come now," he said ; "that is better. He, of course, stormed against that young man?"

"Yes, Sir Perkins," she said ; "and, as I understand, declared again and again that he would what is called cut him off—yes, cut him off."

"Precisely," said Sir Perkins, pleased. "Nothing more natural ; quite right."

"In this strain he spoke the whole day, coming in and

out in great excitement. I tried all I could to soothe him—indeed I did—representing that matters were not quite so bad as he said.”

“Oh!” said Sir Perkins, a little uneasily. “You did? Indeed?”

“*Indeed* I did,” she went on. “Then we dined together, and all during the dinner, Sir Perkins, I said all I could—you mustn’t be angry with me, Sir Perkins—in favour of that poor young man. I showed him how unreasonable it was, on a sudden turn like *that*, to eject a poor boy without an hour’s notice, and turn him out on the world. I did, indeed, Sir Perkins. I owed it to my conscience to use the opportunity.”

“Oh, indeed, Madam!” said Sir Perkins, stiffly, and yet more uneasily.

“But,” said Mrs. Lepell, confidentially, “before he went to his room that night, I am glad to say that by my poor efforts I succeeded completely *in changing all his views, and had the happiness of bringing him completely round to an indulgent and more Christian view to his own relations.*”

“You did this, Ma’am?” said Sir Perkins, starting up. “Then I think you—I mean—I don’t quite understand—why, then, I suppose he may never have changed his mind at all?”

“How can I tell, Sir Perkins?” with a curious air of slyness and innocence. “What opportunity could *I* have of knowing?”

“Oh, of course not,” said Sir Perkins, hastily amending the false step he had made. “Besides, we have reason to know perfectly that he did destroy the will he had made. It is all quite right. It was seen only a few days before by his solicitor, and was then deposited in a certain place. It is gone now. It has been destroyed. Thank you very much for the assistance you have given me. I am sorry we can’t have the pleasure of seeing more of you. But you will understand, under the circumstances——”

“Oh, I think I told you,” answered Mrs. Lepell. “Our chaise has been ordered since this morning. We

could not stay. By-the-way, I shall see Mr. Severne in town. I know I shall. I could say nothing to him from you, Sir Perkins? He will be anxious, of course, to know exactly how everything stands."

At this point Mr. Duncan entered to say that the carriage was ready. Sir Perkins was looking at her with great wonder and surprise, doubtful whether he should put a question to her. But this sudden entrance disturbed him. He thought it was better to leave matters as they were. Then their trunks were brought down, and Mr. Lepell—not quite so well to-day—was assisted down tenderly by the anxious Mr. Duncan, who had said, reassuringly—

"Leave him *hall* to me, Mrs. Lepell, Ma'am. Don't distress yourself *pussonally* about it."

Nothing could be more delicate than this gentleman's last attentions. At a hurried interview in the hall, where a moment's privacy was secured, Mrs. Lepell offered her little *honorarium*, though Mr. Lepell had himself "taken care of Duncan," that gentleman—with a delicacy rare in his order—actually put it back, a little offended. Such art had this lady of conciliating the mysterious beings who wait on us in this world.

But here some one came. Once more that "low beast," the coachman, as Mr. Duncan afterwards described with much reasonable indignation, "must go thrusting hisself in, a smellin' of the steebles, enough to make a dog sick." Words which were reported by a meddler to that gentleman himself, who, in bold and blunt language, and with many strong oaths, talked of bunting up all the eyes in Mr. Duncan's head, only that the latter was too chicken-hearted to give him the chance—adding "that if he'd only step down to the stable, while Bill stood fair, *he'd* give him a lesson," &c. It was only the obvious indecency of such a step at such a season that prevented a meeting between the two gentlemen.

It seemed a sad and wonderful change for Mrs. Lepell as the carriage drove away down the avenue between the old trees. Crowds of incidents—new associations—

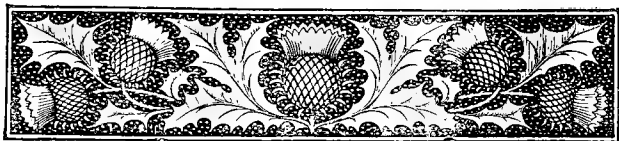
had been fitted into those few days. But as the snow which had fast bound Sir John's ponds and his avenue, and charged the branches of his plantations, had now passed away and been dissolved, so were all the little prospects for life which she had so reasonably built upon that visit suddenly thawed away. Nothing can be conceived more *mal apropos* than a cruel interruption of this sort. Most of us have found such, with the fairest opening for making pleasant friends, and finding pleasant company, vistas of future meetings, assistance, and co-operation spreading through years to come, suddenly all broken up by some sudden blow—the lights extinguished, the crowd dispersed. The accident which has opened such a pleasant prospect—that might have actually determined the whole of a future life—is no more than an accident, and will not recur again.

No doubt some such train of speculation was in our Mrs. Lepell's mind as she drove silently down the avenue, seated beside her husband, who was suffering, and silent also. Had she spoken she would have been cross or pettish, as was, indeed, not very unreasonable.

Digby—"dear old Digby," with its spreading demesne and fine wooding—looked very grand and magnificent as the trees closed in, and she was now going back to the prose of life.

BOOK THE SECOND.

MR. SEVERNE.



CHAPTER I.

NUMBER SEVENTY-FIVE BROOKE STREET.



NUMBER Seventy-five Brooke Street was now occupied by the new family who had taken it on lease. It was a little thin strip of yellow front, with a dark green hall door, plate glass, and green-tiled flower-boxes in front. Persons passing by, also remarked a system of mirrors at the proper angle, outside the parlour, and which could scarcely be used for reflecting the flowers in the boxes. This house had been newly taken; and after having fallen for a long time into dirt and dilapidation, a "family" had come in and "done it up," and were "actually" now in residence.

The new maid, with sleeves drawn up, and standing at ease, with her broom at rest, pausing in her cleansing of the steps—being on terms of intimacy with her neighbour next door—had her early morning's gossip—just as she had her morning's cup of tea—across the railing that separated the two hall-doors. She was a round, bright, brisk, industrious little creature, and laboured at her broom or towel, as if it was an oar.

"Yes, Mrs. Flinders," said Patty, which was the name of the bright-cheeked round maid, "they've come back at last—Mister and Missis. The poor gent, Mrs. Flinders, is quite broke down—and, indeed, I'm sorry for him. If you had seen him when they were here a week ago, as fine, and tall, and straight a gentleman as you'd see

come up a steps. Like a noble lookin' sergeant, Mrs. Flinders."

Mrs. Flinders listening with fresh interest—at the introduction of this similitude—laid aside her broom, and leant on her elbows to hear better.

"Ah, now, dear me, *that* sort of man. Ah, I know." She had a sergeant before her mind at that moment, whose intimacy she had once enjoyed. But he had been false.

"Yes, indeed," went on the maid, warming, "a fine soldier-looking man—and there he came back all doubled up, and battered, and next to a cripple, and *no* voice, Mrs. Flinders, beyond a whisper that you couldn't hear from me to you. They were *in* the railway when it run off the line. It was all in the Sunday paper. So Mr. Waterhouse told me, who reads his through and through, every Sunday in the pantry, and reads beautiful too, better than many a parson."

"And she?" said Mrs. Flinders, with a nod at the windows.

Patty paused a moment; and having checked her torrent of words, said, with hesitation—

"Oh, she's very well, and all that, but—she's too sweet, Mrs. Flinders, by a good deal; and all the time goes peering, with her eyes here and her eyes there; and her voice is too cold for one of her years. Ah! his is as gentle as a lamb's."

"Then that will never answer," said Mrs. Flinders, decisively. She was a woman of experience. "I know her sort well—*well*, my dear. Coming down to count the scraps—where's this and where's that?—I know how *that* all ends. Ill-will and dishcomfort, and a whole treen of illconvenience to both parties—to one party and to the other," she added, as if the variation added new force to the sentiment. "It 'ill hold on for a month; but then it *must* give way."

"To be sure; there's Miss Helen, his daughter, gentle as any lamb—you wouldn't know she was in the house. Mr. Water'us was on the step, passing, and said she reminded him of Lady William Something. Ah, she's

sweet indeed; and I can tell you, Mrs. Flinders, the *other* one don't like her, I can see. We may kiss and kiss again, Mrs. Flinders, but that don't mean everything."

"No more it does, my dear," Mrs. Flinders answered, beginning to enter into cordial animosity against the lady of the house. "And who was she at all, I'd like to know? What right has she?—a nursery governess, I dar'say, my dear. That's *their* profession—looking after the children and the lessons; and the master comes in—'I hope the children are getting on.' 'Oh, yes, Sir.' And then there's a blushing, and the master comes again—all to look after the children. You know, my dear, what that leads to. I have seen a bit of life, and I tell you that's a regular p'fession."

This was a new light for Patty, who was a fresh country girl, and had seen only a little town service. She had great independence of her own; but great respect for that knowledge which only actual acquaintance and experience of the world can give.

The baker's gentleman now coming up with his morning's supplies, interrupted this little domestic review; and in a moment both ladies had instinctively settled their caps, and were engaged in rallying their acquaintance with much gaiety and smartness. By this short conversation the reader will see that a daughter of Mr. Lepell's by a former marriage made a third in the newly-taken house in Brooke Street; and though we all know pretty well that such an arrangement is in many instances highly inconvenient, where the parties are of the gentler sex, still the gentle character of the young girl was a guarantee for the most perfect harmony. Besides, what an inconceivable comfort, too, for the invalid father, with the soft eyes—to have an object on which his eyes might rest.

It must be said, however, that Mrs. Lepell was not insensible to the dangers of this step; and when forming their little *ménage*, she could not but recollect that there was another sister—another daughter of Mr. Lepell's, very fairly married, with whom it would be far more

desirable that the young girl should be established. Of course this project would have its difficulties, too; for here was a new *ménage* also, and a young couple; and the present of a third (with a young husband, &c.—in fact, who does not know the objections of a wife?) would have been found inconvenient. Still, it seemed to Mrs. Lepell about the most advisable that could be adopted, and not very long after her marriage she threw out this proposal.

“What!” said Mr. Lepell, “turn out my poor little child—leave her without a home! You cannot mean that?”

It was during what is called the honeymoon; so she said, “Of course not;” but, with her cheek resting on her hand, seemed to find the whole question not a little embarrassing.

On that unfortunate journey in the train, when the accident occurred—when they expected to be at their house in a few hours—she again brought on the subject. A very reasonable doubt had occurred to her; girls in that position had always a “feeling” against the “new mamma.” If the new mamma was “young and inexperienced,” there was an advantage against which it was hopeless to struggle. That sort of persecution she could not endure.

The soft eyes looked on her wondering. (Those who had journeyed with them had remarked what a listless, silent, and most mournful bridegroom this was).

“If she gives you one half-hour’s — one minute’s annoyance,” he said, “you can banish her, without notice. I say this with confidence. I take the issue as you put it. Her mere presence can be no offence?”

“Dear me, no!” said Mrs. Lepell, putting back her bonnet and smoothing her hair, absently.

“Well, everyone must love to be with her; if not, she will be with us always. Surely, never was there a sweeter disposition; and, as I said, if she brings with her into the house a single hour’s annoyance, turn her out—upon the streets, if you will.”

“Upon the streets!” said Mrs. Lepell, smiling. “How

strange ! There is no need to drive the poor child to such an extremity as that. All I was thinking of was your—*our* complete happiness !”

“I have made up my mind,” he said, excitedly, “on *that*, at least. I cannot lose my little daughter. I cannot go so far as that—no, not for anyone. I am not called on to make such sacrifices ; indeed, indeed, I am not, and cannot, and no influence shall get me to do it.”

Mrs. Lepell sighed, and fell back with a sad and resigned expression. She had unloosed the strings of her bonnet, for the carriage was a little “close.”

There was a very fresh and bright young officer at the other end of the carriage, who was going on leave. He heard the sigh and some scraps of the discussion, and it almost seemed to him that she threw him a look appealing for sympathy. He was fortunate enough to escape “without a squeeze,” as he well put it, in the collision, and gave a very happy account of his journey only the next day at mess.

“I was sitting here, you know, at this end, and they were at the other. He might have been her father, so he might—a regular grey boy, like the old colonel that called here to-day. I took her style at once, you know, the moment I got in. I know something of that sort of line ; and when I offered my newspaper you should have seen how the old cock glared !”

“Bravo, Dick !” said an approving comrade. “You’re the lad !”

“I saw how the ground lay, at once,” went on Dick, encouraged. “A case of selling to the best bidder ; and presently they began to spar, you know, and he to growl and turn savage. ‘I’ll not let him into my house,’ said he. ‘I won’t have it.’”

“That was you, of course,” said the sneerer of the party.

“I don’t say that,” said the other, “but I could see, you know, how the country lay ; and then she kept giving me a look every now and again, as much as to say, ‘I say, pity me—help me,’ you know.” I declare I

was quite sorry for her ; but it would hardly have done, you know, to interfere exactly—one couldn't well."

Mr. Dick said this irresolutely, as if in compunction at having not behaved very chivalrously in the matter ; and his brethren, with grave faces, seemed to doubt whether, under the circumstances, they would not have interposed, supposing they had made similar advances in the favour of the lady. It was altogether a nice point, and was warmly debated up to midnight ; and Mr. Dick, being largely rallied on his "success," grew yet more mysterious in his communications—hinting that much more had passed that he could not well, in honour, disclose at a mixed society of that sort. This is the weak side of all gentlemen's society ; and who does not know how many imaginary conquests, equally unsubstantial with what Mr. Dick thus related to his friends, has vanity helped to effect ? Mr. Dick's victory was based on those involuntary, piteous, and imploring looks which our Jenny—it was an unconscious habit of hers—threw on him.

Now, at Brooke Street, Mr. Lepell was ill and weak, and the matter could not be renewed. Besides, the daughter—a gentle, amiable girl—was making herself useful ; discharging a thousand tender offices, and watching over her father night and day. Affectionate daughter and still more affectionate wife ! he must have been a very happy father and husband.

In the course of the day during which Patty, the maid, and her acquaintance had had their conversation across the railing, arrived a dark brougham, out of which a Doctor Pinkerton let himself briskly, posting up the steps with great speed. He was a sharp-eyed, wiry, narrow little man, who was in large practice, but of whom enthusiastic friends, warming into a spirit of prophecy, said eagerly, "Mark my words, you'll see him with a 'Sir' before his name yet"—a prediction that was never verified, though he lived to get into very large general practice. Pinkerton had been the nearest doctor, which was the reason he had been sent to. He had a smart, abrupt questioning manner, and air of distrust in his face,

which with those who did not know him well, stood rather in his way; and this, as it seemed likely to be "a long case," was the more unfortunate, for almost at the outset he had offended the lady of the house by his *brusquerie*. He had addressed all his directions to the daughter, utterly overlooking Mrs. Lepell.

"This is a very curious case," he said; "I hardly know what to make of it as yet, he seems so languishing. You must keep yourself up, my good Sir. Don't give way, and we'll pull you *well* through. Don't worry yourself, or let yourself be worried, or tire yourself talking."

Mrs. Lepell, keeping modestly behind the doctor, now came forward, and bent over her husband.

"Yes," she said, "and you feel better to-day, dear, I am sure, after this? The pain is going, is it not? You hear what this gentleman says—you are not to give way or lose your spirits, and you are *sure* to get well. Isn't it so, dear?"

Mr. Lepell's eyes settled on her with a curious restlessness; then turned away uneasily. The doctor looked at her from head to foot.

"See here," he said, turning to the gentle daughter, when they had got out, "don't let him be worried with questions—do you feel this and that, and are you not better? There's no use in it, and it means nothing at all. In fact this—no one need be so eager about these things. *You* needn't in fact come in *at all* to him. We physicians are accustomed to see what a patient's whims are, and I can see pretty well here what his wishes are."

Mrs. Lepell drew herself up, and her eyes flashed.

"*I am his wife, Sir!*" she said.

Pinkerton started a little.

"Mistake!" he said. "I beg your pardon; but still it can't be helped. I give my opinion plainly and bluntly, and can't be mincing matters. Of course there's a medium in all things, and I wouldn't exactly be *too* much with him."

The young girl had gone back to her father. The doctor and Mrs. Lepell were alone in the drawing-room.

"What a mistake!" he went on, smiling. "Shall I tell you frankly, though, how it came about? There was something in his manner to you, and in *your* manner *too*——"

Mrs. Lepell answered him coldly.

"There," she said, handing him his fee; "perhaps *now* you will understand who is lady of the house here. *That* prevents all mistakes."

"The most straightforward language I know," he said. "I think it will not be necessary for me to see him again until two or three days. Though a leech professionally, I am not a horse one. Backhouse would come to you twice a day, and generously and with a noble self-denial put back the proffered fee at his second visit. Still, though he so nobly refuses, the patient is worth a guinea a day."

Mrs. Lepell smiled at this. Doctor Pinkerton told Mrs. Pinkerton at dinner that he did not like her smile, and that he was deuced sorry at that moment he had joked with her. But this view might have been prompted by what she said to him after she had smiled:

"As for that, Doctor Pinkerton, we shall not give you the trouble of calling again. We have our own family physician, who is in town now, and who always attends us."

"Quite right," said Doctor Pinkerton, "and *very good too*. But you must take care that he is a first-rate man, and experienced——"

"Like Doctor Pinkerton," said she, smiling. "Oh, I have no fears about him."

"Oh, of course," said he, a little confused. "But what is his name? Who is he?"

She shook her head. "You are not to have *all* our secrets—good-day."

"I don't believe a word of it," said the doctor, at dinner, to Mrs. Doctor; "it was one of her tricks. I never saw so vicious a look as she gave me."



CHAPTER II.

A DISMAL HOUSEHOLD.



WHEN Dr. Pinkerton was gone, Mr. Lepell and his daughter talked a long time together. He delighted in having her sitting beside his bed, and she read to him. She was a very gentle, affectionate girl; and his soft eyes, as they rested on her, grew yet softer. The father and daughter found a great comfort in thus speaking together; and very often the book was laid aside—the history or novel: in which, to say the truth, he took not very much interest—for his attention seemed always to be wandering away. At this time Mrs. Lepell was below at her lunch—a chop and a glass of claret—for what with the affairs (his daughter was as helpless as a child), and the patient upstairs, she had a good deal on her mind. After the lunch she sat in her easy-chair and rested a little. She was still very indignant with the doctor, and smiled a little to herself, as she thought how pleasantly she had punished his freedom. “It will be a good lesson to him; perhaps he will find that he has lost a very profitable job.”

The day thus wore on, which was indeed the pattern of many days. The anxious lady of the house had many concerns to look after. There was a little furniture—odds and ends, in addition to the more weighty and necessary matters—the “furnishing,” in short, which every newly-furnished house requires. She had a great

deal "on her mind," as she often said gently, of herself, not with repining, but accepting her lot cheerfully. Who was there to share the load with her? Had she not become a nurse to a hopelessly broken husband? and as for the young girl, considering that it was not a usual thing to have such an arrangement during the first months of such a marriage, it would not be unreasonable to ask that she should take her share in the labours of the place. However, Mrs. Lepell made no complaint, none in the world, and accepted her lot, whatever it was, with exceeding cheerfulness, and contenting herself with working like "a contented and willing little horse." This was her own phrase. It should not come from *her*—the beginning, at least, of whatever was to come.

Thus then the day went by. The lamps were lighted and tea brought in. The mistress of the house made it, unassisted and alone. There was no sympathy for her. Up stairs the father and daughter were still sitting and talking together; and yet scarcely talking, for the father would merely ask a question, and for the rest of the time hold her hand, and look listlessly at her eyes.

"Don't you like that doctor, papa?" she asked. "Is he not kind and considerate? and something about him so firm and confident, that I am convinced he is to do you good, and make you quite well again."

Mr. Lepell sighed.

"I don't know," he said; "but I do like him. I feel hope when he is by; and I should like if he came to me often."

"So he will, papa; he said he would be here at eleven to-morrow morning."

"I am glad of that," he said, "not that I am worth wasting our little money upon; but I should like to see his face now and again. But he can't make me well, though—I don't know—there is something strange over me; and *then*, my darling, what will become of you?"

The daughter stooped over gently, and kissed his lips.

"Think of *that* always, dearest papa," she said; "what will become of me, and make it help you to stay with us."

Why, you are quite strong now; the doctor says so. Only, he says, if you let any idea fasten on you, it will keep you from getting well. So, for *my* sake you will promise me? Oh, papa," she said, her face suddenly contracting with terror and pain, "you will think of that, what is to become of *me*; where shall I turn to *then*? *There will be no one left.*"

A strange blankness, and almost despair, came into his face. He seemed to answer what was passing in his mind more than the words she had spoken.

"My darling, my child, how can you ever forgive me? I thought I was doing all for the best. I thought it was all honour and duty, indeed I did; and I felt such pity and grief; and then I thought that you—I did indeed—that you and she wished anything that I wished. Did you not—or did you?—for it now seems so long ago."

The little girl soothed him.

"Yes, indeed, we did, I am sure we did; and it has all turned out very well—much better than it might have done. So you must not worry yourself, or think of it."

"Turned out well?" he said, sadly. "When I look back to myself at that time, oh, how selfish, how wicked, how guilty I seem; so *meanly selfish*, to abandon you, my little dear, in that. But I was in a dream, a delirium, infatuated, stupified, and I almost hope I shall be punished for it, and indeed an avenging hand has already fallen on me."

"Hush, hush, dearest," said the girl, almost passionately. "If you think in this way you will make me wretched too. The only thing that keeps us up is that. Don't! don't!" and she stooped down over him, and put her arms about his shoulders, and lifted him up, and with silent tears bursting from her eyes, pressed a kiss upon the pale white forehead.

They remained silent for many moments. The topics of consolation which both had been applying so laboriously had been given up now. It seemed agreed that all was idle and useless now. Suddenly the door opened,

and the lady of the house looked in. It almost seemed an intrusion, for there was a curious scene, the silent and sobbing daughter, the melancholy and suffering father. Both looked up as she entered, and could make no attempt to conceal their misery.

Mrs. Lepell stood at the door a moment. She had a medicine that had been ordered in her hand. She stopped in the doorway, and remained looking at both.

"Again!" she said. "Both are interchanging sorrows, and your wrongs. I have come to persecute afresh, you see," and she held up the medicine bottle; "we must look to this plain, practical view of things, even at the risk of interrupting such tender communings. You had better go down stairs now, Miss Lepell. You should wait for the mornings, at least, for talking over the wrongs. How is your father to sleep to-night, pray, if his nerves are to be worked on? What can be the result but miserable tossing and fever? A really considerate daughter would keep such topics for daylight. I tell you, you had better go down now, and go to your bed too. And if I have any authority—and in this our patient here will support me, I am sure, for it is all for his own interest—I would have you wait until he is well before you begin dwelling on any of those unhappy matters for which there can be no cure of any kind now. I don't ask you to help me, or to put yourself to any trouble; *that* would be too unreasonable."

There seemed to be sound truth in this, and the young girl hung down her head. Then looked irresolutely at her father.

"You won't go?" said Mrs. Lepell, gently. "Well, with all my heart, stay, then. Would you like to give him this yourself? There, then," and she handed it to her with an eagerness; the young girl took it.

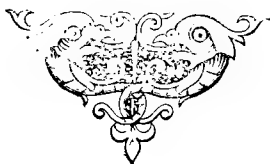
"Yes, dearest, take it from me. It will do you good." There was a pause. Irresolutely and in deep distress he glanced at Mrs. Lepell.

"No," he said, "I can't let you, dear. Your mamma, she was kind enough to bring it, and make it, too. Go down," he added, hastily, "and *can't* you do as you are

told? This talking *does* excite me and makes me nervous."

"If you have more to say together you can come back. I only speak for his good," said Mrs. Lepell.

Without a word the young girl bowed her head, and went away silently. She looked back irresolutely; the wistful eyes strained towards her, as though he was now, indeed, abandoned; and then the husband and wife were left together.





CHAPTER III.

MR. SEVERNE AT HOME.



WE now turn to another household. In a square, some three or four streets away, was a small house, with a very low door and no steps, which had become the residence of the Severnes. It was very neat, clean, and compact, nicely furnished, and might almost have done for a twin sister to that of the Lepells. It was scarcely, however, so well to do in the world. Mrs. Severne had only a modest jointure ; and our Severne, her son, as an attorney and trustee or two, who had to do with the Severne estates, knew, had absolutely nothing. Who can tell, or who, indeed, has a right to know, to the very figure, what the fortunes are of their male and female neighbours? Even those who have authority for what they give out, cannot make allowance for the proper deductions and additions. Still, from the style of living, lodging, &c., a sort of rough measure can be applied ; and on this principle people said, confidently, that, "Oh, Mrs. Severne, she is pretty well off! a good six hundred a-year jointure." Of Severne, the young men of his acquaintance said, as confidently, "We all know *he* hasn't a sixpence." But *their* sixpence stood for four hundred pounds or so each, and represented only genteel rags and mendicity. The difference between such an income and nothing was really inappreciable, so they did not give themselves the trouble to think that there could be such a thing as a gentleman "living on nothing!" But more valuable in

their eyes than any poor five hundred a year had been that contingency of succession to the late Sir John Digby's estates, which was considered so certain and was so well known, that it could be discounted into a very handsome income. But, alas ! the truth really was, that Severne had now "not a sixpence" in the world, and was dependent on his mother's jointure. Yet he met this untoward state of things without the least despondency—rather with a joyous alacrity. "Well," he said, very cheerfully and very often, "I shall now have to work for my bread. It only comes to that." Just as another man would say, "Now all our ready money is gone, I shall have to sell so much stock. It only comes to that." The "work for his bread" that *he* could do was to be, in short, of such splendid quality that he had merely to announce that he was about to take off his coat and begin, and he would at once be hired. "Well," he said, again and again, "it only comes to this—I must set to work and earn my bread." For, as with the young men alluded to, a few hundreds a-year was equivalent to "not having a sixpence;" so that "bread" which young men of figure and genteel bringing up wish to earn, stands for earning good meats and second courses, and excellent wines daily.

The way this bread was to be earned, in Severne's instance, was by "going to the Bar." His gentle mother had pleaded with remonstrance against such a step. They had interest, and good interest—that is, *she* had. Lord Windowborough, who had been Foreign Secretary, would do anything for her. Long ago he had known that charming lady at Florence, when he was Ambassador and Lord Hoogley. He was now "in," and she had only to write him a letter. There were a hundred channels—a hundred ways open. But Severne, in a bitterly stoical mood, yet not ungenteel with her, "for women could not see the thing like men," was *determined* to have no compliments. He *would* "earn his bread." He had thought of it long at nights, in his bed, he said, on his pillow, "when others were fast asleep." He would be dependent on no man. He would eat no man's bread. He

had determined on the Bar. It would take time; not much money, certainly, but a deal of labour. It was not to his taste; but then it led to everything." There was no depending on rotten reeds there, he added, very bitterly; "no foolish leaning on promises, and delusive affection." There you depended on yourself, thank God. Everything was straightforward and certain. You did your stroke of work, whatever it was, like a man — right off, and took your money without shame. There could be no base, *unworthy*, *cruel* disappointments there. No; and Severne's lip quivered, and his voice trembled as he thought of this bitter mortification and wretched blow. And Mrs. Severne's gentle eyes filled up.

"Ah!" he said, one of these nights, when he was talking over his prospects, which was very often, indeed, "you don't know all I have had to go through. Even those miserable women with daughters. Not that I care. The men at the club, they are good fellows enough, and don't care about such things. Indeed, I should like to see one of them so much as alter his manner to me. They know better!"

And this was the tone of his evenings—not very cheerful, certainly, for the early days after the reverse. He had, however, taken the first formal step for the "bread-earning." His name was entered at an Inn of Court; he had begun to "read," and read hard at costly law books. He had determined to forswear all balls and amusements. "I am a Pariah now," he said, "I have worse than the mark of Cain on me. The mammas would shun me as if I was infected."

His mother, gentle and always compliant to every wish of his, remonstrated.

"But why give up altogether?" she said; "you will meet people and make friends, who may turn out more useful than any hard reading. I would go out as much as before."

"Ah, dear mother, you don't understand. Indeed, you can scarcely—I know you mean well and for the best. But *how* can I do it? Have all the women pointing to

me, and telling my story, for they all know it, every one of them? Goodness," he added almost passionately, striking his forehead, "what a mystification! Why did he do it? why did he bring me up so deceitfully for so many years to that one expectation? It was cruel, and base, and wicked. I didn't want it. I didn't ask him. I only wished to be like other men. If he had given me a profession of my own, and told me to expect nothing from *him*, I could have said nothing. But to deceive me, ruin and degrade me in this way—have people pointing me out as the *reduced gentleman*, ejected from his place—this was too malicious altogether. God forgive him for what he has done!"

The gentle mother would try hard to soothe him, but without effect; and evenings which should have been given to his "reading for the Bar," went by in this way, consumed by miserable retrospects.

But very soon the "reading for the Bar" became almost unendurable. He said openly:

"I am taking a disgust to the whole; and whose fault is it? Not mine, certainly. I was brought up to other things. If it had been instilled into me when a boy that I was to earn my bread, *that* would have been a different thing. But as the tree falls, so it must lie; as it is planted," added Severne, as if he were already addressing gentlemen of the jury, "so it must grow. If I had been so brought up, it had been a different thing. *Now*, whose is the fault?"

He put all this very well and effectively, arguing it in many ways, and with much varied illustration, dwelling on his own unhappy situation with singular fluency and even relish. Indeed he had often said, that when he got to the Bar, an easy unconventional speech to the judge and gentlemen of the jury would be the department in which he would certainly excel. There are people who thus (in a comfortable arm-chair) laboriously and complacently prove that their situation is the most hopeless and desperate in the world.

But all this while Mr. Severne, though "earning his bread" with the best intentions in the world, was still

spending a good deal of money. He had been brought up "like a gentleman," and had the tastes of a gentleman. Was that *his* fault, he would ask again, or the fault of those who so brought him up? He must have "his glass of wine" and "his horse" now and again, and his other little luxuries. God knows, he said, *they* did not cost much, and Heaven knew how much he had fallen from. Luckless Severne, it was hard not to pity him now.

Hard, certainly, not to pity him still more, when the marble table in their little hall began to bud, as it were, all over with an efflorescence of papers and letters — the plentiful crop of old bills and demands arising from his freer and more opulent days. These might have "stood over" as long as he pleased; it would have been "no matter," and "any time" would have done, according to the agreeable complacency of the rich man's creditor. Which pleasant verbiage and Louis Quatorze courtesy had disappeared, to give place to short business-like demands; to be succeeded by the more blunt and peremptory requirements, and finally by impolite "threats." But by-and-by, these were succeeded by the writers of the letters themselves, who came and stood in the hall, and made their demands in person. It was only when this sort of probation began, that Severne at last realised the inconveniences of his situation. And it must be said, indeed, that this weary battling with "duns," always beginning, never ending,—becoming the day's portion as it were,—is the most cruel *disillusionment*, for any genteel, good-looking child of fashion, who has been accustomed to deal insolently and haughtily with traders and shopkeepers as the very dregs of the earth, and perhaps by the name of "brutes." There is a miserable squalor almost in all this descent and degradation; and under such conditions it was no wonder that Severne's heart began to give way, and the pleasantries of "earning one's bread" became a vapour.

But this decay was spread over some time. These were but so many hints of what was going on slowly from

day to day, through many weeks, and we can all fill in the gathering shades and touches of the process by which, from being a sort of cradled and petted darling, the gallant Severne came to suffer rude indignity, both in speech and action, and was overlaid as it were, with a moral mildew and decay. Every man, said Douglas Jerrold, wants a thousand pounds ; and the genteelest has, at some time, been "pressed by tradesmen." But all this is more or less anticipation.





CHAPTER IV

LORD JOHN DINES OUT.



WE have yet a third household to peep into. Occupying lodgings in a little pinched house not very far from a stable, yet nearer to a great and fashionable square, the two Palmers, mother and daughter, lived *their* life. They had an introduction or two; but Mrs. Palmer, who was business-like even in pleasure, soon turned casual acquaintances, made in foreign places, to profit. She burrowed into the great London soil; and, so to speak, unearthed them. Quiet but well-born people recollected the pleasing mother and brilliant daughter, whom, with the compromising familiarity of foreign places, they had taken to their bosoms with pledges of future favour and welcome. Though the cold skies and prosy atmosphere of old England bring a certain awakening from such a dream, and such welcome with a stare of surprise the acquaintance who "turns up" so unexpectedly, in the broad daylight, after the footlights have been extinguished, and the little comedy of foreign "outing" is over for good. But Mrs. Palmer was one of the trained soldiers of fortune and life. She did not accept the attitude in which the ordinary occurrences of life would place anyone else. She made them—and without much effort—take other shapes, that suited *her* purpose better; and besides, she had recommendations of her own, and by her own merits could repay those who so patronised her. She was a firm, steady, yet not pushing, lady, that "made her way," with

calm composure, too, that caused those before whom she sat to feel that she was their mistress. No one knew much about her ; but still there was an indistinct impression everywhere, that she and her daughter were refined and desirable people of genteel family, but of not very opulent means, whom it was very suitable to know, and "have at your house."

In this class were the William Archbolds—a "well-off" family of a certain good nature and simplicity, which comes of living a good deal in the country. This sort of amiable rusticity can do no harm when balanced or overlaid by plenty of means and a handsome fortune ; but if it ever came to "pushing one's way" in life, where there is such a fierce competition, and where anything that is worth having, is only to be obtained by hindering some one else from getting it, they must have dropped behind hopelessly. Most of us know our William Archbolds. We meet our William Archbolds generally abroad in their first flush of delight, with all the new sights and people about them ; our William Archbold, who has plenty of money, wearing a white waistcoat, and bringing his whole family about with him, in a generous and costly manner. The other men there pronounced him a real good fellow and "no mistake" (though privately "a little bit of an ass"), and he would not leave Bessie or little Polly at home for the world. He is eager also to make friends, and generous in "standing" a dinner, or sending to you to take some of his champagne. Nay, he is proud when you do him that honour, for he has found some of "your young swells and whipper-snappers" rather inclined to resent such offers of hospitality. The Mrs. William Archbolds that we know too belong to the simpering matrons, who feel that they have been greatly kept back for years by their rustic seclusion, and who are only now beginning to take their place in the world, and be appreciated. In the country, alas, they were "the best people in the world ;" but when they go back, it is likely that our William Archbolds will have grown false and ambitious, and utterly spoiled.

Before going home to Archbold, they had taken a

house in town for a few months, "to give the girls a polishing." Our William Archbold had made a little protest. There was the estate to be looked after, and the place, and the new out-offices which were building, and the county meetings—"and you know, my dear, this expedition has made a pretty fair hole in the treasury. We have done very fairly until *next* year"—a view, however, that did not come home to Mrs. William Archbold.

Our Archbold family were established handsomely in a good quarter. They had met Mrs. Palmer and her daughter in their travels; and Mrs. Archbold had been delighted with that lady's knowledge of the world and acquaintance with "high people." Mrs. Palmer had in consequence been pledged to "come and see them down at Archbold—mind, now, we'll look out for you!"—in that "effusion" of foreign affection which has been alluded to. When they met in town they were glad to welcome their new friend, asked her to their house, and showed her to their rustic acquaintances. They were now giving a dinner, and Mr. Archbold, having been lucky enough to "pick up" a real bachelor lord, that noble person had, in a very friendly way, agreed to come and take his slice of mutton at their house, instead of at his club.

The bachelor lord kept them waiting a long time, very nearly half an hour past their hour, and then entered without any apology. This was pronounced afterwards the pink of noble manners; for one of your vulgar people, you see, would have gone on apologising and making a fuss. He had to be introduced to Mrs. Archbold—a ceremony also performed with great nervousness. Mrs. Archbold could have prostrated herself before him for this condescension: but he had the most free and easy manners, and set her perfectly at her ease—as, indeed, he had done many a woman before her—"My dear lady, ask them about me in the Rue Notre Dame Lor—ahem! You know where that is." Indeed she did not, simple lady: nor the charming beings to whom that region was consecrated. In fact, as it was no other

than our friend Lord John, it needs no words to tell us that though he hardly knew a soul there, he was perfectly at home in a moment.

The staple of the party was made up of some rustic people—rough, agricultural persons, “but who could buy and sell you and me.” He dropped into a snug easy chair, next Miss Palmer. “Well, my dear,” he said, “how have we been getting on ever since? Miserable break up, that good house. As snug a bed as I ever rolled in, and really surprising *eau forte*, and that kind of thing. There was as good a creature in the little spirit-shop on the stairs, Mrs. Hardcastle (I have seen worse made women, my dear,) who never let me get dry. Well, and about yourself,—your charming self,—how is this abandoned world treating you, and our poor degraded lover? You know who I mean?—*qui faisait des yeux*!—Poor soul—a pity really; it’s really as great a reverse as you’d read of in the Roman history.”

Miss Palmer, scarcely so brilliant as she was, turned on him her flashing eyes and burning cheeks. “Degraded! whom do you speak of?”

“Oh, come now, that’s uncommon good, my dear. I am too old a bird; older than you take me for. I’ve roosted too long in Paris, and all sorts of places. I could tell you a story about Mimi somebody who played innocence—ahem. No matter, I mean *some one* who tried the same thing; but it wouldn’t do. It’s the worst game in the world. God be thanked, there’s dinner at last; though everything will be soddened and as dry as my throat this moment. There’s your man coming to take you down. God send you safe.”

Mrs. Archbold saw her guests pass away two by two; and then, with a pride that made the upper portion of her person inflate like an india-rubber figure, placed her arm in Lord John’s, who, well trained in his office as a show lord, had waited his turn, all but whistling.

“Egad, Sir,” he often said, describing this ceremony, “at these places the woman always keeps her off eye on me, as if I was going to bolt; and d’ye know, during that time I get so infernal hungry, and thirsty too—as if

we were going to be late, you know—and then don't I race her down stairs! I vow to you I get ashamed of my species when I think of their little shifts and littleness. Why, don't I know as well as I know my prayers—ahem! that they *hire* me for my dinner, just as they hire their infernal shabby spindle-armed epergnes you see sprawling in the middle of the table; or, begad, like their shabby waiters at seven and six a piece. But I can tell you, my friend, they don't get me so cheap as they fancy. I manage to take some of the colour from their faces before I go home, and make them wince a little—and know their place, my boy, and not play tricks with the aristocracy. There were people called Hoby or some such name—that got hold of me, for a dinner—lawyers, I believe, saving your presence—as mean and scraping a lot as you ever set eyes on—and they set us down to a lot of cheap champagne and claret—that positively destroyed me *here*, Sir! The thing was jobbed by contract—and jobbed cheap—scamped, Sir! I made the fellow blush at the head of his own table. I exposed him, I can tell you!”

His Lordship was seated next Miss Palmer on one side. The lady of the house, whom he had taken down, and who was inclined to interrupt him, he soon silenced and reduced to a nervous trepidation with a “My dear lady, where did they get hold of *you*?” He wished to talk to Miss Palmer, whom he admired, and who, he said after dinner, “was as fine a bit of wall fruit as you'd see on a tree.” Mrs. Archbold once more struck in after her first correction, and had to be dealt with summarily.

“My good lady, do be reasonable. Keep your eye on that butler of yours, and for God's sake tell him not to creak with his shoes so—it makes me ill. Look at that other creature—one of the hired wretches we must all have in *to* help the regulars. See how he is ‘blowing’ into our plates and faces. There's lots to look after, Ma'am; don't you see my little game with the pretty girl on my left here?”

The lady could only smile awkwardly at this reproof, which was, however, spoken in the most good-humoured way possible.

Miss Palmer was very reserved, and had indeed rather shunned the vicinity of Lord John. But that noble lord was not, as he said himself, "to be done in that way." A hunting young man had made for the place, but Lord John promptly tapped him on the arm.

"Beg your pardon," he said, "*we* are to sit there. You'll let our Lady of the House choose her place?"

Abashed, the hunting man stumbled out of the way, falling over a chair. Another seat had been marked out for the "lady of the house," after much anxious deliberation; but his Lordship must, of course, have his own pleasant way.

"Come now," said he to Miss Palmer, "you're as sore against me as anything—I know you are. You made a set against me from the post."

"I did not indeed," said she, coldly. "I suppose we hardly exchanged a dozen words."

"No matter," said his Lordship; "you don't like a bone in my—My God! they call this French cookery—bone in my skin. I suppose some wretched scullion has been got in to do the whole job—lock, stock, and barrel—for ten and sixpence. No, you don't like me; you think I'm free and easy, you do."

"I think nothing about it, one way or the other;" and she turned to her neighbour, an amiable young gentleman, newly put into the public offices. "Were you out to-day—were you in the Park—I suppose you were?"

The youth answered eagerly—

"Not to-day, but I was yesterday. It was quite gay. I sat there for two hours; and I saw Lord Cinquports come round three or four times in his drag, with four of the most perfectly matched bays you ever——"

Lord John did not relish this slight. "I say, Mr. Archbold," said Lord John.

For a second there was a silence—an obsequious

silence. The lord was going to speak. Pleased and nervous, Mr. Archbold said—

“Yes, my Lord!”

“Look here, Sir, at my neighbour here — I’ll tell the whole thing out,” said his Lordship. “By-the-way, those truffles — really — very fair!” and his Lordship looked round restlessly.

“Bring them back—bring them to Lord John,” said the master of the house, almost fiercely, and in dreadful agitation at this honour.

The butler and the strange attendant, whom Lord John had called “a hired beast,” stumbled over each other, and got “clubbed” in their confusion at this exceptional demand. The guests looked on with silent awe and admiration. *We* should like to have seen *them* ask to have the truffles brought back.

“I learned to like these things at — Paris, where I was taught”—Lord John all this time was leisurely picking out his truffles — “taught to eat by a very charming and virtuous young person—that—I was—in love with at the time,” added his Lordship, with perfect gravity. “But at Digby, where Miss Palmer and I were together, and the greatest friends, we fell out, on account of a certain young fellow whom I took up, and she would abuse me if I said a word for him. I knew what all *that* meant. I could tell the most diverting adventures about our stay at Digby. A fine young fellow there, that some of the Novel fellows would give their eyes to clap in their books, brought up to an estate, and suddenly degraded, Ma’am, as it were; cut off with twopence three farthings. Frightful, isn’t it? Makes us doubt if there be a Providence at all over our heads.”

This profanity rather shocked some of the more serious guests, but Mrs. Archbold only smiled with delight; and it is to be feared, if the nobleman had denied the existence of a Supreme Being itself, in his own droll way, would have only smiled the more.

Miss Palmer had started as she heard this.

“I don’t quite believe that,” said she, very bitterly. “Poor, poor Severne; and is he reduced so

low as that? Goodness! can nothing be done for him?"

"Oh! never fear him," said Lord John, confidentially; "he'll do well enough. He has his eyes open. You remember what I said about discounting one's face—that is, if one *has* one. Well, he's hard at work in that direction—I have reason to know it. And let me tell you, it's the only sensible thing he's done this many a day. There we go! Your time's come. Look at the women trying to catch each other's eyes. Look at the smirking and wincing—my God, what acting goes on! Well, good-bye, if you must go."

When the ladies were gone, Lord John went up to the place of honour, and there, as it were, took the command. The other men guests were full of awe and reverence—none more than his host.

"Help yourself, Lord John," said he, proudly. Indeed he delighted in striking that chord. "Lord John,"—it had such melody! "I think you'll find that more than fair claret."

"I remark every man says that of his own," said Lord John, "even when there's some poisonous stuff just been decanted before your very eyes. The brazenness of our day is something wonderful. Not that *this* isn't very drinkable, and as you modestly say, very fair. I don't believe," added his Lordship, sipping it slowly, and inclining his glass to one side, "that this is worse than what's put before you at *A*, *B*, or *C*'s table—in fact, rather better I suppose than what *C* gives—*who* we all know, of course."

All the guests looked as if they knew who he meant.

"I assure you, Lord John, though it is not the thing to talk of prices, &c., the sum I gave for that wine would surprise you."

"My good friend, and well-intentioned host, do I dispute that? Did I dispute old Digby, who turned up his toes the other day, coming to me and saying, 'I know it's not the thing to talk of prices, but the sum I gave for that horse would surprise you, namely, two fifty.' 'It does *not* surprise me, Sir, for I can see with my own

eyes, that the thing is a mere screw, and not worth tuppence halfpenny.' Surely you have not lived to this time of day without learning that price alone won't do without judgment to back it? The sooner you get *that* notion out of your head, my friend, the better and cheaper for you. I speak for your own interest, you know. What is it to me, of course, if you fill your cellars with all the 'rotgut' in the kingdom?"

"Oh, no, it is most kind indeed," said Mr. Archbold, almost hot with confusion, and overwhelmed with this strange word.

"Don't mention it," said the other; "not but that this is very decent tippie indeed, and I am sure can be drunk without bad consequences—very fair indeed."

So fair, indeed, that though everybody else had done, and was eager to join the ladies, his Lordship only faintly protested against another bottle being opened for his special benefit.

"Now don't do that," he said. "Ah, I see — our friend opposite," and he marked out a pink and fat gentleman opposite to him, and of very few words; "it's touched *his* palate, I see, eh? Gratify him, Sir. Gratify him, by all means. I'll help you out with a glass or two."

The stout gentleman, who indeed cared little for such drink, was half alarmed, half flattered by such notice.

"No, indeed," said he; "on the contrary, I have been taking very little of it."

"Oh, my goodness," said Lord John; "that's your line, is it? Just listen to him! Trying to excuse himself. There's nothing to be ashamed of, Sir, let me tell you! That's really not bad. Here, set it down before this gentleman. You're sponsor for this bottle, and now take the head off without any more shyness."

Everyone was delighted with his Lordship's humour, but everyone had long since had enough wine, so that to his Lordship was left the monopoly of the new bottle. The pink, stout gentleman, a little flattered after all by the late recognition of Lord John, was inclined to take his share, so as to have the credit of being in some sort

of partnership with his Lordship. But Lord John, seeing him thus encroach, was inclined to punish him.

"No, no," he said, "that gentleman there is inclined to *renchérir* upon what he said. Between you and me, I *think* he meant to throw reflections on your vintage, my friend. Now, I shall act for our host here, and just cut him off, as a punishment, ordering him to concentrate himself on the sherry, as a good lesson."

To thus punish the gentleman, who became greatly confused and heated at this public notice, his Lordship kept the claret very comically by him, finishing it eventually; and as he detained the gentlemen, he was rather amusing with various anecdotes, which usually began, "When I was in training in Paris, getting my education, you know—learning to mortify and bring my appetites into subjection, and chastise the body, Sir—which, I am sorry to say, our friend opposite seems *not* to have done," &c.

The result was, when they went up to join the ladies, his Lordship was in excellent humour—almost in "effusion," as he would say himself.

"Now, I tell you the truth, Archbold," he said, as he went up stairs, "don't go to bed unhappy, or be taking it out of your wife at breakfast. That last bottle was devilish good, no matter what that stuck-up voluptuary opposite may say. Don't mind him; he don't know B from a bull's foot. I can see it from the mere cut of him. It's very fair stuff indeed; quite good enough to put before *him* and a dev'lish deal better than he ever sits down to, I'll swear. Tell us now what you give for it, and where?"

"I assure you, my Lord, it costs me a hundred and eight shillings a dozen to lay it down."

"Well, I'd give it eighty-four—not worth more. But d—n that fellow opposite—from his airs one would think you were giving us common *ordinaire*, at a franc a bottle."

From that night Mr. Archbold regarded his rustic friend with a secret hostility. "I'll never let him inside my doors," he said to Mrs. A. next morning. "Such ill

manners. As Lord John said, he wasn't accustomed to sit down to drink such wine as that. Indeed he wasn't. Cock him up!"

Lord John entered the drawing-room with a radiant face, and eyes that sparkled a good deal. He went over to Mrs. Palmer straight, and flung himself into a chair beside her, regardless of Mrs. Archbold's springs. More guests had been invited "on the strength of the lord."

He told some one after, that he and Mrs. P. were very old friends. "Long ago, my good Sir—in the days when I was being educated in Paris—she was as sweet a young creature, Sir, as ever put a needle in a bonnet."

The two were, in a moment, deep in conversation. Mrs. Archbold heard fragments of their talk, which she retailed to her husband. Indeed Lord John spoke in a very loud voice, that might be heard over the room.

"Don't throw her away," he said, "on that pauper. The fellow has nothing before him but the workhouse. I don't like to see a fine girl sacrificed, you know, to a soft, sighing, sentimental creature like that, who'd never earn as much as a common day labourer in the field."

Mrs. Palmer, who spoke in a very low voice, seemed to remonstrate, with "Affections set on him," &c.

"On her grandmother," said his Lordship, with strong contempt. "Her heart set on him? What does that mean, I'd like to know? It's mere nursery talk. I know girls and women—no man better—and I tell you it's nursery talk. I like her, Mrs. P.; there is a bold smartness about her very much to my taste, Ma'am."

Mrs. Palmer shook her head again, and seemed to dissent. Lord John suddenly sat up in his easy chair (he had been lying back, talking with his face to the ceiling), and turned to look at her steadily in the face.

"Ah, I see," he was heard to say. "Now I know what the game is. Affection set on him. Ah, that's not so bad. I say, Archbold, that looks like our friend Burke's peerage—by-the-way, worth a dozen of your old Lodges and Dodds, rascals that dock and curtail and cut us up shamefully. I am not goin' to look for the

House of Raby, I can tell you. I leave all that to my lucky elder brother. Well, Ma'am, now let us see."

He had presently found what he wanted, and read it out, half to himself, half to her.

"‘Severne, Fourth Viscount in the Kingdom of Ireland,’ and all that rubbish. Here we are: ‘Heir, his son, George Chislehurst, born’—hem; ‘married’—hem. Very good. Now, what can you make of that? ‘Married last year.’ So by this time we should be sending for the good—ahem—Doctor Locock—Ma'am. Then comes in that sawney, Severne. Ah, no sensible Jew would advance him sixpence halfpenny on his chances; no, nor Jewess, either, Ma'am."

("Such strange talk, Archy," said Mrs. Archbold, telling her husband; "they seemed so confidential together.")

"Then," she said, quite composed, "I was always fond of a little gambling, you recollect."

"Pooh—nonsense. Too fine a girl to be kept waiting. I tell you what, the whole gang of Rabys will be up in town next week, and we could do something for her *there*. Lots of loose men running in and out. Come and see you to-morrow evening. I get dry about four o'clock."

("These high people," added Mrs. Archbold, "talk so curiously.")

After that Lord John suddenly got up, and went across to Miss Palmer, with whom the pink-faced gentleman had become, as he told his sisters next morning, to be "quite confidential."

"Beg your pardon," said Lord John, edging a chair right in front of him. "By your leave, as the Irish say. Private and confidential, you know. Excuse my back. We have been talking of you, your mamma and I, and I have been telling her what a regard I have for you, and how passionately you doat on me—eh?"

"Why do you always come to talk this nonsense to me?" she said, gravely. "I do not understand, nor do I care for it."

Lord John burst into a loud fit of laughter.

"Capital," he said. "Go on with that. I like you to give me those raps. Do you know you remind me of that little round woman we met down at Digby, the most piquant creature I met since I was introduced to—ahem. Well, no matter. I wonder what has become of that Mrs. Lepell?"

Mrs. Archbold caught the word. "Lepell — the Lepells! Why, we met them—we knew them abroad," she said, with eagerness.

"That's not worth much now," said his Lordship, laughing; "so did their hotel-keeper. Where are they *now*? That's the point. The little round woman took care to give me her address; but, egad, I lost it—lit my cigar with it, I believe."

"I can tell you," said Mr. Archbold, almost proud at having the information required. "I saw her only a few days ago at church."

"Saw her at church?" repeated Mrs. Archbold, looking at her husband.

"Ah, ha! listen to this; uncommon good," said Lord John, in immense enjoyment. "Archbold's been on the sly; keep an eye on him, Mrs. A., I warn you. She is as dangerous a little woman as ever had a husband, who, between you and me, she don't much—ahem. But I am bound in honour, you know. I assure you, at Digby all the women in the place made a set against her. We used to call her 'The Wife's Alarm.' Not bad that. Ah, Archbold, sad fellow! Come, Sir, look your injured wife in the face. Have you been calling there? What's the address? Out with it, and no shirking."

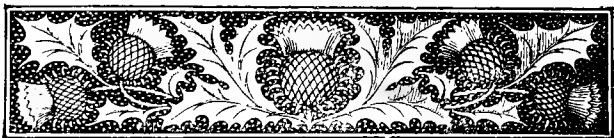
In great confusion at this extraordinary style of conversation, Mr. Archbold gave a foolish smile, which his wife told him afterwards was merely "idiotic," and faltered out, "Seventy-one, Brooke Street, I believe."

"He believes! Just listen to him," said the dreadful Lord John. "I tell you what, I hand you over to your outraged wife. Look here, Mrs. Archbold, parse him well on that. He's been at that woman's house, as sure as my name is Lord John. Look at the guilt written on

his mouth. Work it out of him—wring it from him, Ma'am. She was a little woman not inclined to let any one go. She once got hold of—I declare I must take myself off after all this. This man would corrupt any fellow's morals. I took this for a virtuous house, 'pon my word I did ; but really our friend's depravity is shocking—brazen. Why, Sir, can't you be content with a wife of your own?—and her husband sick and shut up in his bed-room from a squeeze he got in a railway ! Fie, fie ! Here, I must give myself a glass of something after all this ? What's this ? Cognac vieux, M'sieu. P'tite verre—allez donc, M'amselle."

It must be said his Lordship did not behave in this free manner in ordinary circles ; but, as he said himself very justly, he "knew his company devilish well, Sir ;" and "if he had stood on his head" they were sneaks enough to have admired the thing. The party then broke up. Mrs. Palmer and her daughter had come in a cab, and were to go away in one. His Lordship said he would take them home, and in spite of some protest from the young girl, did so. He enjoyed her dissatisfaction immensely. "She thinks I'll ask her to sit on my knee," he said, laughing loudly.





CHAPTER V

SEVERNE'S TROUBLES.

AMONG the larger and more pressing creditors of our unlucky friend Severne, were two—Messrs. Payne and Hardy, the well-known West End tailors—tailors indeed to the sovereign ; and Mr. Slack, the no less known livery stable-keeper. All the young men of fashion got their clothes from Payne's house ; all the young men of fashion got a horse for their riding or their brougham from Slack. A gentleman from Messrs. Payne was always making his circuit round every barrack town in the kingdom, following her Majesty's army like a sutler. It was a joyful morning when it became known that "Payne's fellow" was in barracks, up at Jackson's rooms ; and many mornings were spent in delightful excitement, as Messrs. Payne's *chargé d'affaires*, a gentleman of good address and elegantly persuasive manners, unfolded his treasures, and held out his yards of charming little squares and patterns—while all the "fellows" sat round on beds and on table corners, and wisely shook their heads, and joined in debate over disputed colours. Indeed the dealings of the firm were marked by the highest liberality. They were only anxious for "custom," and, it would seem, not for payment. Wilcox's story was long repeated in the regiment—to their honour and gentlemanly dealing. A Scotch and economical officer had insisted on a half-yearly payment, declaring he never went in debt ; and Mr. Wilcox himself had heard the gentlemanly emissary

say, almost pathetically, "At least leave *something* in our books, Sir." "And I vow to Heaven!" continued Wilcox, telling the story, "the Scotch fellow was touched, and took back a twenty pound note."

Yet their principles of business were certainly fitful, and their proceedings had all the promptness and suddenness of a *Judgment* or of a Nemesis. It was noticed that so long as the sun was shining and the day clear, time or delay was of no consideration. There were opulent men of fortune "in their books" for half a dozen years at a time, and who had merely gone on "ordering." Money was never asked from *them*. But was a gentleman known to be overtaken by cloudy weather, or caught in a storm, even for a time, the gentle character of the firm became changed. Nothing more cruel, vindictive, or even savage, could be conceived. They pursued him with a relentless hatred; they fastened their claws into him; they did not let him go a second. In the Court they opposed him with a bitter fury. Many and many a military creditor had they hunted out of the army, driving him to the sale of his commission; and yet Mr. Hardy, the manager and ambassador, and the Messrs. Payne, seemed to be the gentlest and softest of their kind, and seemed almost too unsophisticated for the wiles and deceits to which gentlemen of their profession were exposed.

Severne was one of their patrons, and had always treated them with an "off-hand" manner peculiarly his own. He would walk into the shop, handsome, brilliant, and in high spirits. "Send me home this and that," he would say. "I want some studs and buttons; I lose half of mine every week. Best pink coral, mind. Let me see them myself. Mr. Payne, what a judge *you* are of such things!" Mr. Payne, feebly and almost grovelingly, acknowledged his deficiency in taste, and would beg pardon for it. They kept such ornaments by them "merely to convenience their customers." And it *was* a great convenience for those whose jeweller's account was a "good deal blocked up." As to settlement, Mr. Severne's tone with these gentlemen was nearly always the same. "This is all *your* look out," he would say.

"I tell you plainly I have no money, and Heaven knows when I shall have any! You are certainly the most confiding of tailors. If you don't know your own interest I am not to teach it to you." But Payne would answer gently, as if the folly was hopelessly ingrained, and that he must pay the penalty of his weakness: "Ah, Mr. Severne, some of these days you will be a rich man, and then perhaps you will think of us."

"Rich man! You *have* faith and hope and charity. By-the-way, you must build me up a dress coat—and, let me see, I suppose I shall want a shooting suit—a quiet tweed; or wait, you may as well make it a whole dress suit—that's a new trouser, send me that as well"—&c.

We should scarcely have courage to put down at its proper figure the amount to which Mr. Severne stood in Messrs. Payne's books. It was something not very far short of one thousand pounds; and yet this sum, considering the sums the firm charged for the very smallest article of dress, was considered moderate for a young gentleman of his expectations. There was the young future baronet—the to be Sir Rupert Cranmer, in whose instance this sum might be quadrupled. But then *it was said*, on what authority we know not, that part of this was for loans in specie, to help that young man over his embarrassments from other creditors. For the Messrs. Payne were true Samaritans.

Going back a little to the time when our Harold Severne had begun to "work for his bread," he had on the first opportunity walked into this house. The young man had said to his mother, who had timidly and ignorantly asked, "Oh, Harold, what are these dreadful people, coming with these long outstanding bills?" that these things seemed more terrible at a distance than near; that it was no use making molehills into mountains, if we could avoid it; with more topics of the same sort. "Yes," he said, "a resolute man will calmly look his difficulties in the face, and it is surprising how, by so doing, they melt away." There was much truth in this. Men, he would have implied, are a little the sport of their imaginations; they give way to morbid exaggeration of

their wrongs and difficulties, which, after all, may be born of selfishness.

Full of this simple way of confronting his embarrassments, he, as we have said, walked straight into the tailoring house. He knew what was suited to his dignity, and to the nature of the situation, so he was careful to "drop" the lofty dictatorial manner he habitually assumed to these gentlemen.

"Where is Mr. Payne?" he said. "Be good enough to send him out to me. Ah, I see him in the office."

Mr. Payne came out with his kind welcome, "Come to see us, Mr. Severne? What can we do for you, Sir, to-day?"

"Nothing, I am afraid, Mr. Payne. The fact is, I wanted to speak to you on business. Better shut this door, if you please."

A curious look was stealing over Mr. Payne's face—a look of distrust and suspicion.

"Shut the door, Sir?" he repeated.

He said this mechanically, as it were; he really meant, "What mischief does all this mystery portend?" Severne was always in the habit of talking for all the shop.

"I may as well tell you at once," said Severne, hastily, and perhaps a little nervously, "how things stand. Sir John Digby is dead, as you have heard——"

"Not a word of it," said Mr. Payne, colouring; "not a word; I don't understand at all, Sir. We have heard nothing of it; when did this——"

Severne coloured too.

"Let me finish," he said. "And it seems Sir John, for reasons of his own, has thought proper to leave his estates away from me."

Mr. Payne started back. "Here, Mr. Hardy, Sir, step in here a moment. Listen to this. He has come here to tell us Sir John Digby is dead, and has left away the whole estate."

"Well! What is that to us?" said Mr. Hardy, gravely. "We of course look to this gentleman himself—to *his person*: to pay us our demands. He knows of

course that they must be made out *at once*, under the circumstances."

"That was what I came to you for," said Severne, now a little scared out of his doctrines, by the demeanour of the two creditors; "to ask your forbearance and indulgence, while I look about me. At this moment, or indeed for a long time, I feel I ought to tell you frankly, it will be out of the question. I shall have to earn my bread now like other people; but I can promise you, you shall be the first considered."

Mr. Payne broke out here, almost into a laugh.

"Earn your bread, Sir! That *is* good. That's not the way we're to be settled with. No 'doing,' Sir, with us."

Mr. Hardy laid his hand gently on his partner's arm. Severne coloured furiously.

"Do you dare to speak to me in that way, you pair of extortioners, after all you have got from me?"

Mr. Hardy was the peace-maker.

"We should do things regularly," he said. "There is no use in this sort of language: it will neither pay us nor raise money. Now, Sir—Mr. Severne, what can you do? what do you propose? what day do you name?"

Severne looked round on his two enemies with quivering lips.

"I tell you, you must wait a little—by-and-by, when I have begun to earn money——"

They laughed.

"No, no," said Mr. Hardy, smiling. "We know what *that* means. Here, let us have something in hand. Four hundred, three, two, one?"

Severne shook his head. "I can't—I can't indeed. I have so many claims."

"Upon my word," said Mr. Payne, "this looks very bad. Have you no proposal to make?"

What could our unhappy Severne propose? What *can* a poor man propose? After much discussion it was arranged that a little money was to be put "down," and that for the rest the firm were to take bills, at a short date. It was with a hanging head and downcast eyes that Severne passed through the languid young men, who

looked at him askance, and understood the whole situation. But they were quite respectful, and one *as usual* having a reverence for a gentleman in adversity, held the door open to let him out.

But at that moment came bounding up the steps Selby and Ridley, and behind them Mr. Monkhouse, member for a little borough. Selby looked grave as he saw him. He knew of his friend's reverses, but had been away, and had not learned that he was all "pressed." He was one of those who assumed in short that every one in the world can at least pay for breakfasts and dinners, and "put good clothes on their backs." Credit at a tailor's is the last familiar that abandons us.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I am so glad. Come in with me here; I want to talk to you."

Severne rather shook himself free. His face was hot and glowing.

"I can't, now," he said. "Let me go. I have business. Don't keep me."

"Business," cried Ridley, "*that's* good. Business with old Payne! Come in, Severne, my friend. Choose me a pair of knickers, your taste is undeniable;" and he put his arm in his.

"Don't worry," said Severne, shaking himself free. "I tell you I have business. You can choose your clothes for yourself by this time;" and he hurried off.

"What on earth is wrong with him?" said Ridley, in amazement. Then, with sudden warmth, "What the devil does he mean by speaking in that way to me?"

Mr. Monkhouse, a tall elderly red-faced man, very sardonic in manner, looked after him, and said slowly—

"I tell you what—our friend Payne has been sending him to school."

They went in. In a few minutes the three gentlemen had it "all out of Payne;" the languid young men whispering at the recital, but apparently in business.

"You'll be hit, my friend, as sure as my name is Monkhouse," said that gentleman, comforting the partners. "Here, give me a light, Payne, or some of your fellows. I always told you so. I never knew an expectant

that wasn't hit or bit. Why, damme, I was an expectant myself, on an old aunt—as tough—and stiff a bit of old grizzle as ever hung on in the world after her time. She *wouldn't* die—no, by the Lord. The melons and sweets she got regularly out of me; and at the end, after all, I was *hit*—I was.”

Mr. Payne told the story in all its details in a very injured way. The other partners stood about, and furnished more details of this nefarious conduct.

“I wouldn't 'ave believed it, Sir,” said Mr. Payne, all but holding up his hands. “Such ingratitude; a gent of his bringing up, too; and to come to us so cool.”

“Quite right, Payne,” said Mr. Monkhouse. “Here, a light again, will you? Nothing lights nowadays.”

One of the languid young men came gliding up.

“Mr. Payne, Sir, there's Lord John in an 'ansom at the door, about that coat! I told him it can't be done till four o'clock. *Will* you see him, Sir?”

Lord John appeared at the door himself.

“Well, how often am I to come? What d'ye mean, Payne?—sending, sending; I'm sick of it. I won't put up with it. It's not the way to treat me. Four o'clock yesterday this fellow swore on his soul.”

“Indeed, my Lord. Fact is, Lord John, there was a mistake about your coat,” said Mr. Payne, gravely improvising a story; “we told off two of our best hands for your coat, and we found 'em beastly drunk at ten this morning; they've been turned off on the spot, Lord John.” The truth was his Lordship was not regarded with much respect in the house—giving very poor orders—and being slack in payment.

“Bosh; Hollo! Monkhouse,” said Lord John, turning sharply on him; “that's you? What's this old women's gathering here? what are you all hatching together?”

“Egad, you should have been here five minutes ago,” said Mr. Monkhouse, leaning leisurely against the counter with folded arms, and closing his eyes to enjoy his cigar; “we had a poor broken devil here whining for mercy to Shylock there. Of course he got it, I needn't tell you.”

"*That's* nothing new," said Lord John. "God help us all, when it comes to our turn. And who was this, now?"

Then all went off into an account of the story. Mr. Payne affected confidence. He wouldn't say, but all might come straight again — a declaration that made Lord John roar again; but he listened with the greatest eagerness.

"Egad! I always said we'd have something of the kind: met him again this year at Digby, and his airs were sickening. By the Lord, sickening is the only word. Oh, Payne, you'll never get tuppence of your money. I know the whole stock. Not tuppence, Sir; make up your mind to that on the spot, Sir. I have reason to know it. Here, Payne. This way a moment; about that coat?"

Mr. Monkhouse pointed with his stick after him.

"I bet you he's goin' to stick the tailor for brandy. He always does it reg'lar. All that about the coat and four o'clock, a damned lie; just for an excuse, you know, to come here. I wonder he hasn't a corner cupboard in his cab."

Lord John indeed did presently come out very brilliant and stimulated, and in much better spirits than when he entered.

"Poor Payne," he said, in great enjoyment; "mind, you won't get tuppence off that feller. I tell you so. I am much better now. I feel as if you had put a stitch in me. That unlucky devil—I knew he'd stick his arm into the wrong sleeve at last. There's a metaphor for you from your own trade."

And his Lordship went off in great good humour.





CHAPTER VI.

AN INTERVIEW.

TH may be readily conceived how a few days of this process levelled the soaring spirit of Severne, and opened his eyes. As he came home, after some of those humiliating embassies, he told his mother "he was heart-sick." His interview with the liveryman was indeed enough to make him so. That person was of blunt "straightforward" manners, even in his most prosperous moments. When he received moneys, it was in a grudging way—complaining, as though *that* fell short of his due. It was 'ard to get, and whatever was got, was long kep' from him. When Mr. Severne, therefore, waited on him, not to beg—but to propose—forbearance, Mr. Slack drew up his shirt-sleeves above his elbows—he received his debtors without his coat—and placing them akimbo, burst into a volley of horse abuse.

"Look ye here, Mister, what d'ye take me for? D—me, I'll not give you an hour. Ye ought to be ashamed of yourself, so you ought. Honest men are to kip 'osses for fine people, and then be done out of their 'arnings."

"Mr. Slack!—"

"What d'ye come here for? Go along out o' this. I tell you I'll have the law of you, afore twelve hours is over," &c.

And yet, after all, Severne found this rude, bare-armed ostler—for he was no better—the most tractable of all

his persecutors, "that blackguard of a horse-dealer," as his customers called him, being only rough in his language. If he had found all like him, Mr. Severne would have fared exceedingly well, and struggled through. But there were others; the Jew jeweller, Rosenthal, who received him as he always did, and had heard within a few hours, as he heard everything, of Sir John Digby's disposition. This gentleman was civil, and smiling, said he was exceedingly sorry, and even took out a tray of "elegant new tings," in the way of chains and coral, for his visitor to look at. These civilities made Severne's heart sink, for he knew that a Hebrew solicitor was already instructed.

After a day of this miserable work he came home utterly prostrate and beguiled.

"He did it on purpose," he said, bitterly, thinking of Sir John; "he never liked me. He thought I was not obsequious enough—not sufficiently grovelling. No man shall ever get me to be *that*—no, not if I was to go in rags!"

He passed by the little street where Mrs. Palmer and her daughter lived.

"Why don't *they* take to threatening and warning me off?" he said, very bitterly. "I suppose that will come next."

With the sensitiveness of a man who feels himself decaying, he fancied he saw a kind of compassion that verged into contempt; certainly into superiority. Mrs. Palmer, for whom he never had any special regard, was, of course, prompting the daughter. A true worldly woman, with her wares to sell to the first Pasha or Aga that offered. This was what was in his mind, as he rang the bell. He was in the drawing-room, restless and walking about. There was a long delay in coming down, which made him chafe yet more. He was about ringing for the maid when Mrs. Palmer came in. She was always a cold, composed woman; but he thought on this occasion she "took him easy."

"Well," he asked, "where is she; dressing, I suppose?"

"No, Fanny is out," said Mrs. Palmer.

"Out! Oh, of course. I understand."

"Of course? Why do you say that? You understand? Ah, I see something has put you out to-day."

Severne's brow contracted.

"I have not much to put me in good humour, as I dare say you know pretty well. Every news travels pretty fast, nowadays. The world is a delightful, a charming—place."

Mrs. Palmer looked at him with an inquiring stare. Then shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't follow," she said. "It would indeed be a delightful place if we had to interpret the mysterious changes we see about us every day. Fanny is out; had to go to her dressmaker."

"Ah! *now* I see," he said, "balls, dinners. So all *that* goes on."

"Why not? we are asked a good deal. Lord John, whom you introduced us to at Digby, is very kind, indeed, in getting us to know people."

"Lord John Raby," repeated Severne, "and you are intimate with *him*? Then let me tell you, if you have not knowledge of the world enough to have found it out before, he is not at all a suitable acquaintance. Not at all. I do not approve of a young girl like Fanny receiving civilities from him. It is my duty to tell you, a free disreputable man like that is no companion for respectable ladies."

"What is over you to-day?" said Mrs. Palmer, calmly; "you are finding fault with everything. Let me remind you that it was at *your* house we had the pleasure of meeting him."

"*My* house?" repeated Severne, in a trembling voice; "that is nice, certainly. I understand what you mean. It was *not* my house at the time. *I* am not responsible for Sir John Digby's acts. But still, Mrs. Palmer, you must forgive me, if I repeat that I *do* most solemnly object to Fanny's associating with a person of that sort."

"Quite right," said Mrs. Palmer, "quite proper. But

there is no danger. I, her mother, am always with her. You can't expect us to behave absurdly, you know. I am not *quite* old enough to give up the world as yet; by-and-by will be time enough. Lord John takes an immense deal of trouble. He has introduced us to his family, who are now in town, and have quite taken up Fanny."

"Surely," said Severne, calmly, "she doesn't want that *now*. What object on earth—I put it to you sensibly—can she have in going on as other young ladies? I thought *that* was over now."

"Oh, it is always useful to have friends. We all want them sadly. The poor child, too, mustn't be moped. She will have time enough for that. One of her beauty and gifts is not to be *quite* locked up in a chest or a cellar; there is plenty of time for all that. There is no harm in having her little holiday *en attendant*."

"I see," said Severne. "I see—quite—very proper, and very sensible and prudent—I follow. I suppose you have been hearing from Lord John, who has been telling you—he hears everything—the way I have been hunted and persecuted? Of course he has; the whole town knows it—he is too good-natured not——"

"We did hear indeed something," said Mrs. Palmer; "and Fanny was going to write to you. But is it all so bad as they say? I hope not."

"Quite," said he, maliciously; "worse, if you like. see no opening. Of course, it is not much matter for you and her. You are going out and amusing yourselves; *I* have to fight the battle. I got another delightful piece of news this morning—did you hear *that*? Of course, it is nothing to me. *I* never considered the matter at all, or let such a thought near me. But the world will chuckle over it."

Uneasiness came into Mrs. Palmer's face, and she moved in her chair with disquiet.

"What is all *this*, now?"

"You are getting disturbed," he said; "perhaps you guess it. There was a letter this morning from Smith, his Lordship's excellent agent—of course to the tune in

which I get all letters now — wanting money from me——”

“Well?” said Mrs. Palmer, all eagerness, and in her eagerness not heeding the bitterness of the last remark. “Well, and what is *his* news?”

“Why, he has only had a joyful letter from the old Lord, with good news. The delicate heir, whose life we were told was not worth three years’ purchase, and who only married some one to nurse him, after all this long trial, it seems, is to turn out a happy father.”

Mrs. Palmer coloured and started up.

“This is good news. Really you *are* in luck!”

“Am I not?” said Severne, ruefully. “Not that that’s a difference to *me*. Not in the least. I never thought it worth counting on for a second—I feel the same as I did yesterday.”

“What charming philosophy! your equanimity is really to be envied. However, you don’t speak for others.”

“Others! No, of course not,” said he, looking at her; “why should I? It makes no difference to *them* either, I should say.”

“I don’t know—I can’t say,” said she, walking about, and her colour rising every moment. “I really don’t know how to look at the thing at all. I must consider, and consider for others too. Really, when a gentleman comes to be turned into a perfect scape-goat, and has a knack of drawing every misfortune in his train, and seems to enjoy them too, it becomes a question whether the same ill-luck will not always pursue. You really have behaved in so extraordinary a manner to us altogether—bringing us here to England—deluding my unfortunate daughter under fine prospects—that——How do you propose to make up to us for all this?”

Severne was aghast. This attack seemed to overwhelm him.

“This from *you* — *you* for *whom* I have lost *everything*!”

Mrs. Palmer proceeded.

“Oh, that is nonsense; you might have managed it

better. There was no need for all that heroism. I declare I lose patience when I think of the way things have gone ; and really, with all the grandeur of one who had ten thousand a-year——”

He was utterly overwhelmed.

“This is worst of all,” he said ; “but I could not have expected much more. Still I know Fanny will——”

“Oh, as for Fanny, poor child ! she has worry enough. I can’t have her harassed, and I must really beg that you will not—as I have said, there is no hurry ; we really cannot be jumping in the dark. There is Lord John Raby, so kind and good-natured, and anxious to do everything for her. His family are in town, and it is no harm if she have a little gaiety. She is entitled to it, Heaven knows.”

“Lord John Raby !” said Severne, bitterly ; “a fine patron ; a proper person to take up a young girl ! Do you know what you are doing ? Do you hear the stories about him ? It is disgrace, contamination ; and I *will* protest against such an intimacy if — ours is to go on.”

Mrs. Palmer laughed. “Excuse me. That is a little too good. We met him at your house, was it not ?”

The door suddenly opened, and Miss Palmer entered hastily. A gentleman was coming after her up stairs.

“My dear child, give us a chance, d’ye hear ? Ah, if I was running after you—in the gardens at St. Ryder——How de do, Mrs. P. ?”

Severne looked round at all three, from one to the other, with contempt and anger.

“I declare ! Hallo ! Severne,” said Lord John. “So there *you* are. Just came on your track at Payne’s, you know ; you had only left a second or two when I drove up. Curious, hey ? Just drove up in my hansom ; found Monkhouse and the whole gang of them chattering like so many monkeys when they get hold of nuts, you know. Egad ! they seemed to have got hold of nuts *this* time.”

“I suppose so. I don’t doubt them,” said Severne.

"There are plenty of malicious people everywhere—more malicious than monkeys are, I can tell you."

Lord John laughed humorously to himself, enjoying something.

"To be sure there are," he said; "what would the world be without *them*, I should like to know? Now, Mrs. Palmer, to business—my precious sister-in-law, St. Ryder—the countess, you know—is going to give one of her gatherings. Lords, dukes, and swells of all sorts—an odious gathering; everyone absolutely packed on each other. 'Pon my soul, it's not decent; however, that's not *my* concern. The swells are to be there; so if you and Mademoiselle—ah! *my friend! quelle a du fraîcheur. Regardez, mon pauvre Severne!* Ah, my dear, if I were a man—a gallant fellow, thinking of settling down in life—Well, the point is, you must go. One of their regular formal pasteboards will be handed in at the door, of course. I have settled it."

"Oh! Lord John, you are getting angelic; you are too kind."

"Not at all; you know I like you—always did, you know. Bless the memory of the cheerful past!"

And his Lordship "hummed," in the true nasal French twang:—

"Nos amours de la jeun-ess-e
Revient au grand ga-lop, ga-lop!
Tum ti, tu la! tu lay!"

Severne had got up and walked impatiently and noisily to the window. "Disgusting!" he muttered, almost aloud. He motioned, with an imploring look, to Miss Palmer to follow him.

"Fanny," said her mother, "come back here, dear. This is really kind of Lord John. You have been sadly moped lately. Wouldn't you like to go, dear?"

"To be *sure* she would," said Lord John; "I'll come for her myself in a hansom, and we'll rattle off together snug; you, Mrs. P., following in a four-wheeler, if you like:" and he began to hum again:

"Les amours de no't jeun-ess-e—
Tum ti, tu la! tu lay!"

"Severne, you can come, if you like; I'll get you an order; I have interest, you know."

"No, thank you, no," said the other, excitedly; "don't exert it for *me*. I don't care to go to parties in *that* way; I prefer being asked on my own merits."

"Oh! that's no affair of mine," said Lord John coolly; "to say the truth, it would have been a job, my good friend. *Les politesses exigent*, you know; and, frankly, I suspect Lady St. R., my good sister, would have made a difficulty *now*."

"What do you mean," said Severne, furiously, and coming over from the window; "what do you mean by *that*, Lord John Raby?"

"What do I mean?" said the other, looking round and laughing; "odds, bullets, and triggers! This looks wicked and bloody. 'Pon my word, my friend, you have a rustic way of putting questions. I give you my word, if you had cocked your hat that way, and looked so at my friend Peltier, he'd have had you out at the 'Bois,' and his knitting-needle through you *here*—his Lordship laid his finger on the lowest button of his waist-coat—'before you could say 'Lord deliver me!' I know what you *thought* I meant, and not unnatural, too. No; Lady St. Ryder sticks at giving cards, she is so drenched with the country vermin, who swarm upon her whenever they hear of a thing going on. I believe they get a second-hand 'Morning Post' down on purpose."

"Miss Palmer," said Severne, "*would* you come in here a moment? I want just *one* word——"

"Go, dear," said Lord John, "you and I will have our talk afterwards. 'Pon my word, Mrs. P., he has you all in good order here."

Severne said nothing, but walked away into the next room. Miss Palmer rose to follow

"Now don't be appealing to me," said Lord John, laughing heartily; "I can do nothing for you; you had better go and have it over; that's my advice."

"Look here," said Severne to her hurriedly. "I see what all this is coming to; however, that's no matter; I say nothing of it; only one *last* thing I may earnestly beseech

of you—shun that man in the next room—keep clear of him. I say this for your own sake ; I am even surprised that *you* should require such a warning. But nothing should surprise me nowadays.”

“And many things are beginning to surprise *me* lately. Why should you think *I* wish him to be here ? ”

“Because I have eyes to see and ears to hear. It has wounded me deeply—I did not expect it from you—even what I saw within the last minute. But, of course, *you* are not to be different from the rest ? ”

“This is a strange way to speak to me,” she said, a little excited ; “you have been worried or troubled with something, I suppose ? ”

“Ah ! you have picked that up, too,” he said bitterly ; “but I am not so reduced as you would make me, and have my honest independence of mind left ; and I shall speak plainly, Miss Palmer. I don’t approve of your seeing that man, or letting him in here. I was shocked, indeed, to see you come in after parading the town with him.”

“Parading the town ! ” she said, quickly.

“Too fine a word, perhaps. Then were you, or were you not, pray ? ”

“I shall not answer these questions,” she said, almost defiantly ; “you should know me better. I am the best judge of my own conduct—at least mamma is.”

“Let me finish, then,” said he, calmly ; “and I am very glad we are putting things on this footing. Indeed, she has explained your *new* views to me already. I do not approve—and distinctly object to your appearing at this party, or being brought there under the wing of that man.”

“I can say nothing ; I can only do what mamma approves and directs. You will think of this later more calmly.”

“Never,” he answered. “You treat this lightly ; I don’t, I can tell you. It is a very serious matter—but do as you please. Take what course you please ; I have merely said what my poor notions of propriety dictate. I know,” he added vehemently, “that *any* girl that gave

herself over to find pleasure in the society of a man of *that* description, or could bring herself to accept compliments from him, *I* should look on as—as—*degraded*—yes, degraded! Of course, this is only *my* absurd notion, which you may mind or not, as you please.”

She had an impetuous temper; as impetuous as his.

“This is kind and generous! These seem like *orders*,” she said. “You leave one no choice; you have no trust in one’s own guiding principle; but no matter—we shall see.”

“Is that all you say—is that what you tell me?” he said with a quivering lip.

“We shall see,” she said, calmly, and turned away.

“And—you shall see.”

He paced down the street furiously, and saying to himself, bitterly, “All the same! all the same!” The events of the day—annoyances accumulated one on the other, had fretted him till he was all but in a fever of worry and trouble. Some allowance might reasonably be made for him, for hitherto he had found life but a pleasant garden, with smooth walks, in which it was rather “a bore” to stroll, but where there was at least no inconvenience. Now, he had been suddenly thrust out upon the rude high road, and found his feet cut with the sharp broken stones, and his chest searched through and through by cold east winds, and was shouldered and bullied by every low tramp he met. It was a great change.

In this mood, just as he reached the top of the street, he felt some one’s hand on his arm. It was his friend Selby, whose face was looking wistfully into his, with the deepest sympathy and compassion.

“My dear boy,” he said, “I have been looking for you, and wanting to see you. I have been at your place, and should have been before, only for——”

“Make no excuses, my dear friend,” said the other, with a forced laugh. “Why should *you* more than anyone else? I am very glad to see you, all the same.”

“I was so—so sorry,” the other went on in the same tone of deep sympathy, “to hear of all this. It came on me like a——”

"Well, now," said Severne, "do let us have done with it, for God's sake. Everyone to-day has been coming to me with long faces, and condolences. I am not in a workhouse yet, as you see. So let us leave it there, and talk of something else. How are you getting on yourself?"

"But I *want* to talk of this," said the other, putting his arm in Severne's, and walking along with him. "You know me so long, and we were at school together, so my speaking to you isn't like anyone else's. Now, I have heard all about this, and, in fact," he added, confidentially, "I just came up to Payne's only a minute after you had left; and—"

Severne shook his arm free. "This is growing unendurable. Are you all in a conspiracy to ring changes on *that*? So *you* made one of the gang at that place, to talk over and publish what has befallen an unfortunate man. Yes, and degrade me before those heartless fellows. I am sick of it;" and he turned to go, leaving his friend stupefied, with a deeply wounded look on his face. Then he turned back on a sudden, and put his hand out. "Forgive me, my dear fellow," he said; "but I don't know what I am doing or saying. I don't mean it, indeed. But I have been so worried and *hunted*, I don't know where to turn to, or where to look to. God help me."

The other was as troubled as he was. "Come, come," he said, "don't be cast down. You have plenty of friends. I know you have me, who would do anything for you. And I must speak plainly to you, though I may offend you. Now, this business of Payne's—you know what wretches they are—if you would let *me*——"

Severne's brow contracted. Selby, of all people in the world, was the man he had counselled, lectured, and given the advice to of a man of the world, against improvidence, &c.

"Now," said he, "I can't have anything of that sort. I want nothing from any man. I can fight my own way. I want at least to keep my self-respect, and not be degraded. So now, my dear friend, unless you want to

have done with me altogether, like the rest of the world, please not a word on that subject. I don't want to quarrel with *you*. But you understand me by this time. Don't you see I am greatly obliged to you, all the same. But things are not *quite* so bad with me. Here, cab! You see I can afford myself a hansom. Good-bye."

He jumped into the cab that came up, and drove away, waving his hand to his friend. Perhaps he was a little pleased at first, for he might have thought he had done better that way. But as he lay back, the sense of his wretchedness and that worse feeling than wretchedness—of being "hunted" and persecuted, he said the word to himself very often, with the addition of a "God help me!"





CHAPTER VII.

A STRUGGLE AND VICTORY.

IN the front bed-room at Brooke-street, the patient was not mending. The friendly Doctor came often and pondered over "the case," yet could make nothing of it. "He does not mend," he said, "and he ought to do so; his injuries were not, after all, of that serious kind; he is strong, and comparatively a young man."

This he said in the drawing-room, in presence of his young daughter and Mrs. Lepell, who attended most scrupulously on every occasion to hear his opinion, and to recompense it suitably. She never liked this medical attendant. She often said what folly it was having an obscure man of that sort—a rough, rude fellow, too—when they might have the best advice in town for the same money. But at the proposal to dismiss the Doctor, the patient fell into such misery and alarm, and the proceeding was so opposed by his young daughter, that Mrs. Lepell, with excellent discretion, always gave up the point.

Indeed it was a sacrifice on her part, as, it must be said, the Doctor's behaviour to her was anything but cordial, and scarcely respectful. As he gave his opinion his eyes would rest on her with meaning.

"My good friend," he would say to the patient, "what you want is what neither I nor any man in the world can do for you—you must make a struggle and rouse yourself; shake off this depression. I suppose *you* can have

nothing on your mind ; if you have, you know that is all beyond *my* skill. I tell you plainly it is no use my coming this way day after day. Take my advice, put away from you all depressing thoughts for the present ; let them come back when you are well and strong enough to entertain them. Come, now !”

The only answer to this appeal was a faint smile and a deep sigh—so deep, that it seemed he was struggling to raise a weight off his chest. The smile was for the face of the young girl beside him, and whose hand he held all the time.

“I repeat,” the Doctor said one afternoon in the drawing-room, “I don’t see my way here. The man is under some deep load of depression ; he wants cheering, constant cheering, the cheering of kind and affectionate faces always round his bed, kind and soothing words, a constant encouragement. Why, a little of this,” he added, “would be worth a cartload of all the drugs I could send him.”

“It is most unfortunate,” said Mrs. Lepell, calmly, “that we cannot do all that. We are only two women here, and cannot multiply ourselves into a whole circle of the affectionate faces and speeches you mention.”

“Ah,” said the Doctor, “*one* face, Ma’am, and one look of sincere interest would be as good as a dozen.”

“No doubt,” said Mrs. Lepell ; “but are you finding fault with *his* daughter—my step-daughter ? Do you mean that *she* is unfilial, or neglects her duty ?”

“*Indeed* I do not,” said the Doctor warmly ; “if it rested with her devotion and love, he should have been well months ago.”

Mrs. Lepell shrugged her shoulders.

“It is very hard to follow,” she said. “Once you travel out of your strict line, you lead us all into confusion ; so, if you please, we will keep strictly to *that*. What prescription do you give to-day ?”

“As you ask I shall tell you,” said the Doctor, suddenly ; “and I was only thinking of it last night ; I think if he got a change—a change of place, scene, and persons——”

"Change of air?" said she. "Why, I asked you that at the very beginning—before we were settled a week here. You appear uncertain, indeed, in your views."

"Perhaps I am," said the Doctor, trying to keep calm. "But circumstances alter. What I propose now is, that he should go down to some quiet bracing, sheltered corner on the sea—away from town. I have a treasure of a friend—a Doctor Cameron—under whose care we could put him. He is down in the brougham at this moment. A month or six weeks would set him up."

"You seem to think we are people of vast fortune," said she, "which we are not, to carry on our illnesses in this magnificent way. How are we to rely on this cure? Perhaps when we get there you may send him back to town. We are poor people, I assure you, and cannot afford money to help our Doctor to make experiments."

"Oh, *that's* the difficulty," said he, "economy—then I can settle that. I have thought of all that. I have a little box of my own on the coast—a charming little place to which I sometimes run down myself. We will bring him down at once."

"Very kind, indeed," said she, "but we have no wish to be indebted to you for such hospitality."

"Quite right," said the Doctor, "there again we agree; you and I are not great friends, Ma'am, that's pretty well known. So I like your independence in not wishing to be under a compliment to me. No! You stay here to take care of the house, pay the visits, look after the parties, &c., while I and Miss Lepell carry him between us—to bring him back at the end of six weeks or two months at furthest, sound as a roach—come, do you agree?"

She coloured and looked at the Doctor.

"A charming programme. So part of your cure is leaving me behind?"

"Well," said the other, smiling, "as you ask me, why I may as well confess, that, perhaps it is."

"This is all charmingly complimentary," she said. "Well, I shall speak as plainly to you as you do to me. I think your proposal has quite exceeded the bounds of

professional freedom. I think you have forgotten yourself and have spoken freely and improperly to a lady whose husband you are attending. What do you insinuate, Sir?" she added, her colour rising, and giving a short stamp; "what is the meaning of these speeches and hints you have been throwing out this month past? You are too free, Sir," she went on, raising her voice, "and I have borne with it too long. What do you mean? Say out openly what you mean. I am not afraid—say it as publicly as you like—when and where you please. Now, Sir!"

She stood before him glowing, haughty, defiant, angry, and injured. After all it might be said she was strictly in her right, and so it would appear to the Doctor when he got home and could think it over coolly; she was mistress and administrator of that house, and he had no business to force himself in there, in defiance of her wish. But he was a warm-tempered man himself when roused and *when put in the wrong*, so he answered as defiantly.

"I am your husband's physician. It was *he* who sent for me! No, no, my dear Madam," he said, regaining his coolness, "let us not go on like children. You are very clever, indeed too clever; I must say so; but still I see what I see—and I know you perfectly."

"You do not, Doctor Pinkerton, as you shall find. Would you wait here a moment, please?"

"Oh, certainly," he said.

She flew out of the room, and left him, smiling to himself, and pulling his whiskers before the glass.

"Checkmated," he half murmured to himself. "Ah I should have been a lawyer."

She was not long away, but came "rustling" down with fresh elation.

"I was determined," she said, "to bring all this to an issue at once. It is far better. My husband—as I knew he would—takes his wife's part—and regrets that he is obliged to dispense with your further services, and begs you will not attend here any more."

"This is more of the comedy," he said, in a passion.

"Then I don't accept that. I know what all this means. *My* friend send *me* away! No, indeed."

"Here is his daughter," she said. "I can fortunately meet you at every point of this matter. *You* will tell this gentleman," she went on; "does your father wish this gentleman not to return? Tell him please, in your words."

With a sort of piteous and mournful face, the young girl faltered out,—

"Yes, he said so."

"I understand it all now," said the Doctor, who never relished being defeated at any point. "I know you *now*, Mrs. Lepell, and what you are doing; but take care—I shall watch. Indeed do not think you have the right to do this. I am friend as well as physician; and let me see if anyone *dare* prevent me paying a visit to my friend. Now, let us try that."

"A husband sick in his bed, and two ladies here unprotected, to address us in this language," said she, her cheeks glowing. She did not want for spirit, and, it must be repeated once more, had right on her side. It was her own house.

"Not wholly unprotected," said a voice behind—the voice of a gentleman—that made both start.





CHAPTER VIII.

A FRIEND TO THE RESCUE.

THE servant was standing at the door, and was about to announce "Mr. Severne." It was like a scene in a play—everyone standing looking at each other amazed; for even in Mrs. Lepell's flushed face could be read excitement and dramatic action.

"You wish this gentleman to retire," said Severne, "as far as I can see. I have heard what he said. Let me suggest to you, Sir, the propriety of doing so at once."

"You misapprehend," said the other. "I am Mr. Lepell's physician, and have just paid my visit. I have no reason for remaining."

"But I wish him never to come here again," said she, still in excitement—"oh never! I cannot listen to his insinuations; his visits are one succession of insults; and he says he will return here in defiance of me and of my husband's orders."

"Not of his," said the Doctor, growing excited himself. "Don't say that; I should like to see *him* dismiss me."

"I am so glad you have come in," she went on, in a low aside to Severne—"oh! so glad to see you once more. It seems as if Providence had sent you. This man is cowed already."

Severne always prided himself on his "tact." He went up to the Doctor.

"You are a man of the world," he said, "at least you

should be, from your profession. You can't do this. No man can force himself in where he is not required. I dare say you have a most respectable round of practice—indeed I have often heard your name; so take advice now, and join your friend below.”

The Doctor was at the door.

“Good-morning,” he said. “I suppose I must not struggle with a lady. However, I was going before this gentleman entered. As for the future I say nothing. I shall know how to watch over my friend. I shall contrive some way. Good-day. Miss Lepell, might I speak to you?”

The young girl flew to him.

Mrs. Lepell looked from her to Severne, significantly.

“You see what is the way,” she said, hopelessly. “I am alone in this house, mistress as I *appear* to be of it. All my little battles I must fight single-handed. And indeed it is bad enough—the common, daily, weary struggle; but when it comes to battling with creatures like *that*—when men come into your house and threaten and bully, as you saw now, then my heart sinks. What would have happened presently I know not; you—you saved me! Oh,” she added, changing her voice into a lower and more earnest tone, “I am so glad of this. I have been looking out, wondering, hoping that *perhaps* you might not have forgotten me.”

“My goodness,” said Severne, a little impatiently—“my dear Mrs. Lepell, do you suppose that I have not had my troubles too? Oh, of course they have told you. I am sick to death. I have no time to think of friends or visits. Indeed I don't know what brought me in here now.”

“An inspiration,” she said; “most likely that. You were kind to me before—oh, so kind at—at—that place.”

“No, indeed,” said he, heartily—“not at all. Indeed I often reproached myself, for I had a sort of feeling about you—but only at first.”

“Indeed you were,” she went on—“only too kind to me. That time was a little break; it took off my

thoughts. *Now* you see me back again in the old groove."

"We are all in our grooves again; I am in quite a new one," he said, bitterly. "Of course you have heard?—not even with the smooth comfort of a groove. Such a *time* as I have had of it; you that saw me at *that* place, you couldn't imagine it. I might be some common Pariah, running through the streets, hunted with sticks and stones. And' then you—talking of troubles, and a Doctor that won't go away!—ha, ha!—and a fine house over your head. Why, all the world has taken to persecuting me."

With a look of almost piteous sympathy she half murmured—

"This is only the lot of us all. Which of us escapes?"

"Ah, that is very well in the pulpit," said Severne; "but, take me, why should I be persecuted? One thing on top of the other—every day some new trial, some fresh blow. I wonder how I bear it—upon my soul, I do. Only yesterday that low, stuck-up, insufferable parvenu, the new heir, Sir Parker Digby, comes with his demands; he wants this and that which he is entitled to. What was I entitled to? I always told Sir John what he was—a mean, miserable hound. Turned us out on a day's notice—and when I proposed to him delay, and stated very calmly to him the way I was in, and asked him what he could do for me—which I had a *right* to ask him, mind—if you only saw the lump of ice, the stick of ice, he changed into! I could have killed myself for doing such a thing; I ought to have known what he was. However, all I hope is, that it will all come at once and together, and let me have done with it, for I am sick at heart—I am, indeed—and want to have done with it."

Mrs. Lepell's eyes swam with a kindly sympathy.

"Heaven knows," she said, "I wish I could be of use to you in some way. And how good of you to come in to me and talk to me. And now, do you know what I am going to say?—something very forward and free, and

even impertinent—at least you will think it so, for I have no right to do so ; but——”

She was so very dejected, and had such an humble downcast air of contrition in advance, that Severne's heart smote him, and he could not but smile.

“Don't be afraid,” he said ; “say anything you like.”

“Well, what I mean is this,” she said, in greater embarrassment, “I feel I could *never* do enough for *you*, and I have heard that you, like all young men of fashion and rank, are, and *ought* to be, in want of—in want of——”

She lifted her eyes and looked into his with fresh timidity.

He shook his head quickly.

“Ah,” she said, quickly, and covering up her face with her hands. “There, I have done it. I knew it ; always something stupid.”

“Not at all,” said he, gravely. “I am not at all angry. I understand you perfectly. I suppose a little hoard up stairs. I am sincerely obliged to you ; I am indeed. I can't tell you how refreshing this little warmth of sunlight comes upon me after all the ingratitude and unkindness I have met with on *all* sides. I won't forget it in a hurry, indeed I will not. *You* have held to me, and to say the truth, I did not count on you. But then I have been wrong all through.”

“Oh what kind words,” she said ; “I shall think of these when I'm alone, indeed I shall. But now let me go back ; just hear me, and give me leave to speak.”

“About what ?” said he, smiling.

“About *that*—and I must do it,” she went on, very quickly. “It *is* a little hoard, and of very fair size ; contemptible to *you*, of course, just some hundred pounds or so. We could, with a little squeezing, bring it up to five hundred, I am *sure* I could. A bagatelle, but it might be of use for a bill—a tailor—I mean a bootmaker—or a——”

“A tailor ?” said Severne, colouring, “how do you mean ?” Then recovering himself, “Indeed this is kindness, and I *did* not expect it. I declare the world is

better than I thought. But, my dear Mrs. Lepell, it is altogether impossible. Not to be thought of. I have something here," he said, touching his head, "that will help *me* yet."

"Ah, indeed you have," said she, with enthusiasm. "I know *that*, and that is my security. I believe in your star, I do indeed. You will be great and above us all. I am as convinced of that as that I sit here. You will be rich, have titles, estates, and then perhaps you will remember the old friend that admired you so, and believed in you."

This was spoken with such enthusiasm, that he turned to look at her. Her face was glowing with colour, her eyes sparkling. Here was a bit of nature, as he said later, that was refreshing and even comforting.

"I have something of the same confidence myself," he said: "I have indeed. But why should you——"

"Mark my words," she said, "they will come true, and very soon perhaps. But you refuse me?"

"Ah, yes, I do," he said, rising; "but you are sending me away quite light-hearted and happy. But I shall come very often—very often. I promise I shall look on myself as a sort of special constable to protect you against intrusive doctors and such like. If you want me at any time—at *any* time—mind, send."

"What goodness!" said Mrs. Lepell. "Oh what kindness! And now, let me ask *one* question about *her*, that charming looking creature."

"Oh," said Severne, hastily, "*she is perfectly well and happy*. You recollect what I said a few moments ago about the world. Why should anyone be different from the rest of the world? No, no, she is quite right. Good-bye, good-bye, my *dear* Mrs. Lepell, I shall *never* forget your conduct to-day."

As he went out, leaving her with flushed cheek and sparkling eye, Miss Lepell was standing at the door, coming in. She had heard this last speech, looked with distress and surprise from the handsome young man to her stepmother's excited face, and a look of distress and doubt passed across her face. Severne bowed to her

magnificently, and "like a gentleman," and went his way.

Sometimes Mrs. Lepell went out to drive in a chartered brougham "to pay visits." Poor lady, her list was a very short one. Still there was the drive, and there were Mr. Lepell's old friends, whom she said she would not allow to be "dropped," for the sake of his daughter. Old friends were slack in acknowledging warmly her civilities. But she was very persevering. She dressed on this occasion, and went to her husband's bedside in a charming little "cap of a bonnet," that seemed like the down on a meadow flower, so that you might blow away all the laces and furbelows. It was bent over him.

"I have ordered the brougham," she said, "to go out and pay our visits. Besides, I think *my health* requires a little fresh air. Would you direct your daughter that she must come too? I know what things will be said," she added, smiling, "if I am seen in the Park by myself, luxuriously enjoying my drive. *I* can't afford to be set down as *the cruel* stepmother."

"Certainly, certainly," said the invalid, feebly and hastily. "To be sure. It is quite proper, and it will do her good. Tell her from me——"

"No, no," said Mrs. Lepell, over at the glass, and arranging the "crown" of her bonnet; "I find that won't do. We must have chapter and verse. Nothing on hearsay, it seems——"

The daughter came, with that wistful look of distress and doubt in her face which was now become all but habitual.

"What is it, papa?" she said, laying her face close to his.

"You will go out and drive with mamma," he said, hurriedly, "and dress yourself, and do what she says; she is quite willing you should be *seen*—and go—do."

"But papa——"

The round eye of Mrs. Lepell was looking in the glass, and resting coldly on his face. He saw hers in the glass from his pillow.

"Go, go," he said, wearily; "why won't you do what

I ask?—always this coming to me. There—I *wish* it. It is very undutiful.”

Mrs. Lepell smiled in the glass, and settled a flower. The young girl put her face close, and pressed her lips on his forehead. Then the assumed testiness of his manner all passed away—the light of a yearning affection, tinged with melancholy and grief, came into his eyes, and with a sort of fervour he returned her kiss; then coloured, guiltily; for Mrs. Lepell, turning from the glass, impatient at these formalities, rustled from the room.

When the young girl came down dressed, and she had a fine gossamer bonnet also, she heard voices in the drawing-room. A hansom cab was at the door. There had been quite a series of gentlemen there that day. She went up again, half way, and in a moment a young man came out, very eager and talking in a half-suppressed voice.

“That is all right, dear Mrs. Lepell. You could do no more; you did your best, and it was most kind of you. We must only try to help him in some other way.”

“Yes, yes;” then there was a confidential muttering and whispering, and he went back.

“I’ll come again to-morrow or next day, and we shall talk it over.”

Mrs. Lepell was in great spirits that evening during the drive in the chartered brougham. Her fresh, round, rosy face contrasted favourably with the pensive, mournful one beside her. *She* smiled and talked as though she was carrying on a conversation. Many an old lord and colonel walked back a little for a better view, with a “Who the deuce is *that* now?” After an hour or so of this promenading *en voiture*, she gave a sigh, and then letting down the glass, said softly to the coachman,—

“Would you drive to Sir Parker Digby’s?”





CHAPTER IX.

THE NEW OWNER.

SIR PARKER DIGBY, the new Baronet, lived in a little, shy, and rather mean house in one of the streets about Eaton Square. There he maintained the new Lady Digby, and the Misses Digby in poor state—the son and future Baronet was away with his regiment. A meanness and stinginess almost amounting to privation, combined with an ostentatious pretence, marked that household. Lady Digby came of a noble family, yet escaped the adornment of either “honourable” or “lady,” for the noble family being straitened in means, was also fighting the battle of show and genteel appearance. Of all the vulgarities with which our social system is dotted over—like flaming bows of gaudy ribbon upon the foolish housemaid dressed out for a holiday—this is about the meanest and most vulgar. The very house in which the Digbys lived was truly symbolical of what was within; for it was all over plaster, except at the side, which looked into a lane, where it was suddenly cut off, and the native bricks exposed.

Sir Parker was all cold, and stiff, and dry, like one long bone. Through his dreary cells flowed a thin, watery, uncomfortable fluid, which was not the usual blood. In Lady Digby was exhibited not merely a rich abundance of the ordinary generous stream, but vast masses of material no less generously developed—she being a large,

coarse, stout woman, with an arrogant presence, a fierce and overbearing temper, and a pride that despised everything that was "poor." Next to poverty she contemned what was "low," but lowness could be redeemed by wealth. In only two things were she and her cold husband agreed—the pretence of show and the reality of nearness and stinginess. Once or twice in the year a dinner party was given to a few chosen "swells," selected with infinite pains, whose entertainment was made more unfailing by laborious arts. The swells who came—a Lord this—a Bishop of that—a cheap dining-out Secretary, with a ribbon—saw a good dinner "well done," pretty much such as they saw four times in the week; but they did not see the shabby work that had gone on behind the sham plaster of the house. They did not know—and would not believe if they were told—how the owner and his lady descended to strange and almost menial offices; what a deal of what they saw was the handiwork of their hosts—what unworthy haggling and chaffering over a shilling went on with the very waiters who were "got in," and who, after solemn agreement, were, on some pettifogging pretext, "beaten down" yet further. For Lady Digby was excellently suited to this office, and, when the occasion served, had rude violent language at command, quite in keeping. There were little artifices about the wine—the confidential servant of the house being let into the secret of a select and marked bottle for the Bishop and Cabinet Minister, with cautions, too, about fillings and helpings. As for the young officer or two, it was no concern what quality they got or how little of that quality. One of these gentlemen—a fellow "that could see before him," and of an observing turn, vastly amused his comrades at mess with an account of what he saw on one of these occasions. "I protest," he said, "there weren't bits a piece, and I had to go to the club and dine over again. Jove! I think they got the painted legs of nut-ton from the pantomime. And I declare I caught one of the fellows slily going round and collecting all the bills of fare, to do again, you know; but I was even with them, and took mine up under the table; and the fellow came and

poked about, and at last *asked me for it!* He did, on my soul; ha, ha!"

When they became Sir Parker and Lady Digby, nothing was changed. Their hearts were in the old system. The new place and new estate—they told their friends—"would bring God knows what end of expense on us. They would have to look to every shilling *now* more than ever." But the sorest struggle was over the matter of his place. For nearly five hundred a year was to be given up, and, as Sir Parker said, he had only six or seven years to run to put in his full time and retire on a pension. But the pressure from above and below—the sneers and jests in the office when Sir Parker was "feeling his way," was a little too much. Everyone said: "Of course *you* cut the office; now; a shabby few hundreds is nothing to *you*, Sir Parker," and he accordingly, with a sort of rueful reluctance sent in his resignation.

The affairs of the new succession greatly engrossed him. On investigation it was found that it was a greater property than anyone had supposed. Sir John had managed it in true old-fashioned stand-still notions, with a caution which was merely loss of money. There were mines on the estate, a perfect source of wealth, for which offers had been made by companies, but which were refused haughtily, as if an insult had been received. Sir Parker was alive to all these splendid advantages. The company was already offering *him*; he was not old-fashioned. Thousands and thousands a year would come in with the mine; after the mine a seat for the borough, or perhaps the county: and after the seat a barony; for their party would be in surely by that time, and he really had claims on the county. For in his office, by acting on commissions, and "cutting down" needy clerks, whose only purpose in life was to rob the county of some eighty or ninety pounds a year, to breed up swarming families, he had established claims upon his grateful country, and it was to be hoped more grateful ministry.

Dreaming on this pleasant prospect, and at the same time turning over the papers of the late Baronet, Sir

Parker came upon a little bundle tied up in a very orderly way, and which he opened with great nicety. (He really delighted in this work, and it had become a sort of substitute for that dear lost labour at the office which he had sacrificed, and would ever regret that he had sacrificed.) He found this to be a bond for £500, prepared in the regular way from Severne to the late Sir John Digby. This he duly noted and put aside, to be handed to his solicitor; and a little later Severne received formal application from that officer for its satisfaction. This was a little hobby of Sir John's. "I shan't give young fellows a habit of dependence. I am quite ready to help the lad in reason; but he will respect himself all the more for not being under a compliment. No, Sir; we shall do it all in the regular course, and you shall pay me a trifle of interest; and as for the bond, you won't find me a pressing creditor—if you are regular, that is."

There were other legacies, too, under this old will, and a good deal of ready money to be got together to discharge them; and Sir Parker, who had no idea but that every man must pay his debts in the regular course, and take up his bonds, so long at least as he considered himself respectable, dismissed the matter from his mind; and in his little schedule, which he totted up and made out with true official nicety a great many times in the day, set down "£500" as available assets for distribution.

It was this application that had brought Severne to his house, and had caused that bitter description which Severne had given to Mrs. Lepell.

"You surely cannot be serious," he said, "in this demand. It is simply ludicrous. When I tell you," he added with calmness, "that this was a mere fiction—a good-natured bit of form on Sir John's side, to encourage self-reliance, as he called it."

"A most proper idea," said the other, coldly. "We should all try and cultivate that. But you see, here is your bond—that is to say, at Mr. Sawyer's office—regularly signed, sealed, and made out. In the face of that, what are we to do?"

"I tell you," said Severne, impatiently, "it is a fiction. It was never meant to be recovered. Why poor Sir John—he would start from his grave, if he dreamed of its getting into an attorney's hands. He *might* not have wished to help me in any *other* way—so it proved, indeed—but he certainly did not wish to injure me."

"Oh, that is all quite beside the matter," said Sir Parker, coolly, "among men of business, you know. Anyone could make that excuse when called on to meet their engagements."

"Do you doubt my word?" said Severne, trembling. "Do you dare to insinuate that I am not telling the truth?"

"Oh I must beg—I must really request you will not take this tone. Much better go to Mr. Sawyer. He is in his office daily from two to three. Indeed I don't know why you should come to me."

"Indeed I don't know either," said the other bitterly. "I might well know what to expect. A fine prospect for poor Digby and its estates. Then I can tell you, Sir John would have *died* sooner than he would have had it come to you. I have heard him say so a thousand times. A fine oppressor the poor tenantry will have. Even from the moment you came there, as I have heard, *even to a woman*, you must show your ungraciousness. But nothing more could be expected."

"I can understand all this," said Sir Parker, turning the colour of one of his favourite parchments; "it is very easy to see what it springs from. I can excuse you too, Mr. Severne. Most natural."

"Nothing of the kind," said the other, indignantly. "Such motives naturally suggest themselves to your mind. But I ask you again, have you no sense of decency or restraint, that you—*you* have been undeservedly blessed, not by Providence, for it was only a lucky accident!—can be so greedy and grasping, that——"

"Now," said Sir Parker, rising, "I can really hear no more of this. You must go—er—away. Please do, or I shall be obliged to ring for somebody. In future let *your*

man of business see *mine*, Mr. Sawyer. If indeed you will make some sort of apology for the outrageous language you have used to-day, I dare say he can make out some little delay, just before matters are wound up finally. He will tell you, what you ought to know as a—er—legal person—that I am powerless, and have to collect these assets, and account for them, or pay myself. I am *not* prepared to do this for Mr. Severne or anyone. As for the story about a fiction and all that, it is simply ludicrous, and no sane man could entertain it.”

After this speech, it was no wonder that Severne came away chafing, or gave such an account to Mrs. Lepell. The unhappy young man indeed wanted all sympathy, and his difficulties were indeed serious and menacing. He was bitter and sarcastic in this scene, as a picture of human nature.

“*There is a man*,” he said, “that might at this moment, and but for an accident, be behind a desk or a counter, and would be so all through his life! A little prosperity has brought out *all the meanness* of his heart.” On the other hand, Sir Parker told his friends at the club. “Such a business! The fellow burst in on me, and used the most outrageous language. Really, only that he is one of the family, why one might have thought of the police, or something of that kind. Sir John was perfectly right in *marking* him as he did. I am not bound to keep terms with such an ill-conditioned bear as that. And he shall find that things shall take their course.”

And accordingly Mr. Sawyer received general instructions “to collect” all the assets of the estates, and “get in all debts owing to the personalty” without delay.





CHAPTER X.

THE SICK MAN.

ARRIVED at the Digbys' small and attenuated house, Mrs. Lepell was told that Lady Digby was at home. This information came from a cheap and rather hungry-looking servant, whom the malicious vowed had been taken from a workhouse, on easy and gratuitous terms.

"I can wait for you," said the young girl to her step-mother, "in the carriage."

"But you must come in," said Mrs. Lepell, "really you must. *It is for you*, and for your papa that I am paying these visits. Oh, please—I must beg——"

The mournful young face grew more mournful still, but followed. The two ladies went up stairs. Could we say that Mrs. Lepell was not nervous, and did not feel her heart go pit-a-pat? for this ceremonial was new to her, and she heard female voices in fashionable clatter.

The little room was indeed half full; for this was Lady Digby's "day"—her Monday or Thursday, it was hard to remember. Those receptions were indeed not crowded. Even the cold and fashionable shrank from the house. They were having tea, let it be said, the best, finest, and most costly, for there was no stinginess where show was concerned—but then, it was said that "it was pulled up" somewhere else. There was an important personage present—Miss Storer, a lady whose brother's wife was "the Hon. Mrs. Storer," and who by desperate efforts had been reached somehow. When the next dinner came

round, Sir Parker would lead in that lady with triumph ; there was also present a Mrs. Black, not very highly distinguished in the polite world, yet still mysteriously welcomed at the desirable houses. Plenty of such people are wandering about, whose passports and credentials are never asked for, but which, if zealously scrutinised by the *gens d'armes* of society, would be found out "of rule." About every great family flutter such obscure genteel people—a major, or a Madame "Chose," securely established, no man knows why. How is it that even in those courts to which we all lift our eyes with such vast reverence, the more confidential familiars are mostly persons of simple degree—simple esquires, and even persons of humble extraction ?

Lady Digby came forward to meet her visitor. She had not very distinctly heard the name which the cheap man-servant had announced. It sounded like "Wells"—and there were people of that name, of distinction, who, she had a faint hope, would call one day. She was gracious and affable, and obsequious at the same time. Mrs. Lepell, it must be said, had come up with a little nervousness, but she was now quite reassured. Let it also be said that she was very clever, and was "picking up" skill in her new profession of married lady very fast. She talked very pleasantly and gaily, yet with a modest deference which never deserted her, and which she determined *never should, so long as she lived*—for was it not the best course, as aid either to conciliation or popularity ?

"This is your daughter ?" said Lady Digby, glowing with a sort of oily satisfaction. "A charming girl !"

"Scarcely my daughter, Lady Digby," said Mrs. Lepell smiling. "No ; she is Mr. Lepell's,—by his first wife," added she with natural modesty and a little confusion.

"Mr. who ?" said Lady Digby, starting, "who did you say ?"

"Mr. Lepell," said the other, sweetly. "Sir Parker Digby met us down at Digby during that unfortunate business. Poor dear Sir John, he treated me like his child."

"You, Ma'am," said Lady Digby, colouring and speak-

ing in a low voice; "so *you* are that person? and what do you come here for? pray how are we indebted to you for this honour? I don't know you—I really don't—I don't understand this;" and Lady Digby glowing, panting, and growing more raw and crimson every moment, moved backwards and forwards on her chair, and rustled her stiff coarse silk dress.

Mrs. Lepell looked at her in amazement. Only the lady next to Lady Digby heard well what was going on.

"I really am at a loss to understand," went on the lady, "after what has happened too! And the way you behaved at that place."

The lady whose brother's wife was "the Hon. Mrs. Storer" looked on amazed.

Mrs. Lepell rose gently to go away. "Come, dear," she said to *her daughter*; "I am *afraid* we have made a mistake—the number, or street perhaps. Ah, here is Sir Parker!"

It was that gentleman who peered in with a sort of uneasy glance; but the moment he saw Mrs. Lepell he closed the door quickly. It was a most singular scene, as the ladies present thought. Lady Digby rang the bell. The young girl, colouring, and ready to sink with confusion—for she saw and understood all—could not move from shame and humiliation. Mrs. Lepell alone was at ease, and managed her retreat without confusion. "Such mistakes will occur," she said. "I am so sorry to have disturbed you. I don't know how it happened either. My stupidity, I suppose; many, many apologies for intruding. These things will happen; and yet, I assure you, it is scarcely my fault; for when I was down at Digby—but that is no matter now. Good-morning. Come, dear."

She bowed all round, and retired with great ease. Not so "her daughter," for that gentle child was ready to sink with shame and confusion. Lady Digby's face glowed again on this victory. When the enemy was gone, she told the Hon. Mrs. Storer's sister-in-law the story. This was some intriguing creature, "with a husband that poor Sir John, who was a little weak in that way, had picked

up out of a railway." A most dangerous class that would fasten on you, and who had behaved with the greatest effrontery to Sir Parker—tried to threaten—and only Sir Parker knew how to deal with *her class*, she might have given a great deal of trouble.

This picture struck a sort of horror into the assembled women. There is nothing, as we all know, more terrible than that vague description, "person of her class," "creature," and the like, which presents the idea of contagion, and makes all sound, respectable persons fly in confusion. The ladies' curiosity becoming inflamed by such allusion, was gratified with more details, and over their tea revelled in the picture of these dangerous details, which, it may be added, they later sent abroad very much in the same way they had received it.

But the victim of these calumnies moved softly down stairs without a plume being ruffled. Just in the hall, where the cheap man-servant was coming to the door, she stopped.

"Sir Parker in?" she asked, softly. "I wish to speak with him for a moment."

"He's gone out, Ma'am," the cheap man-servant answered, hurriedly; "gone out to the club."

"So this is the study?" said Mrs. Lepell, as if she had now seen such a thing for the first time; "this is where he sits and works—works *so hard* all the day long?" And the cheap man-servant heard the sound of the door-handle being turned. But it was locked on the inside; so Sir Parker *must* have been at his club. It was no wonder, after the scene with Severne, that Sir Parker should have his door fast locked. He wished to keep clear of *that* connexion, and especially of that dreadful woman who was so persevering and troublesome.

When they returned from that drive the young girl flew up to her father, as was her custom, to try and amuse him. She was struck with his restless eyes and look, more anxious than usual. She sat down beside him, and with artificial spirit told of the people they had seen in the park. Suddenly he said: —

"But those gentlemen, dear; who are they? tell me about *that*; what do they want here?"

"What gentlemen, papa?" said she, in astonishment.

"The gentlemen that were here to-day whose voices I heard; why are *they coming when I am shut up here!* what does it all mean?"

"Nothing, dearest papa," she said, soothing him. "It was only that gentleman at whose house you were—Mr. Severne."

"I suppose he came to ask after me. No doubt. How kind, and what interest to show in a broken down man. And the other, who is *he!*"

"I don't know, papa," she said, frightened. "Indeed, no. 'These are all friends.'"

"Friends indeed," he said, lifting himself up excitedly. "I see what it is all now. It is not fair; it is cruel, wicked to take advantage of a poor sick creature, broken down as I am. But I shall not be hoodwinked in that way. I shall get well; and I am better. They shall not keep me shut up here while *that* wickedness goes on."

The girl looked round to the door in alarm; she was not very "sharp," naturally; but her never-ceasing affection suggested an idea to her. Was not this what the doctor had said; anything to rouse him from the listlessness and languour which had settled on him?

"Yes, papa," she said, hesitating; "it *might* be better that you did try and see for yourself. I am only a child, and can do nothing, and know not what to do; I have no one to teach me."

"Yes, I will," he said. "I shall do all I can; it is my house, after all. That good Doctor Pinkerton, when was he told to come again?"

She cast her eyes down.

"Oh, papa, he is not to come again. You sent me to tell him, you know."

"Ah, yes," he said; "I see the reason of all that *now*. He was sent away purposely—he was sent away pur-

posely. He was too friendly, and was in the way. He would see too much. Yes, I must get up and see for myself; it is high time; and these men that were here to-day—Severne, that is the very name. Ah! it was an unlucky moment that we entered his house; though, indeed, it was *all* unlucky."

"Dearest papa," she said, alarmed at his excitement, "you think too much of all this; it was nothing; they only stayed a moment."

"Ah, but I heard what they said. She, Patty, heard. There has been some intelligence, some understanding, for there was whispering, she says, and he talking of never forgetting her goodness. Yes, dearest, the only thing for me is to be up and watching. They shall not make a cipher of me any more. I shall begin at once. I am not so bad as they would make me out." And the invalid's eyes rolled strangely, and glittered with all the fever of ill-health. He went on. "They think—*she* thinks she has got a puppet to deal with; but I shall show them—show her—from this hour that I am not to be *their* poor helpless creature, as they think. And now, dearest child, I rely on you to tell me all that you see—*all*, mind; and from this hour I shall try and see for myself as much as I can."

When his wife saw him again he was indeed sitting up, though scarcely able to support himself. She was greatly surprised, and perhaps rejoiced, at such a rally. Yet she also observed the new distrust in his manner, the jealous defiance, and the fashion in which his eyes followed her round the room.

"I think," she said, reasonably enough, "you have been a little hasty, and done what is not quite prudent; you are not strong enough for this as yet."

"There are plenty," he said, "who would wish me never to be strong, who would wish to keep me helpless as long as suited their ends!"

Mrs. Lepell stopped in her walk to look at him steadily.

"These are a mere sick man's fancies," she said, shrugging her shoulders, "or I would ask you to whom

you refer. No physician would approve of what you have done."

"Physician!" he said, hastily. "Ah, you have taken care of that; you have driven *him* out, as you think. But he shall come back to-morrow—the first thing."

"Yes," she said, calmly, "we shall send for the first physician in town, or for two of them, if you please, but surely not for that one who has behaved so to your wife."

"For no other. I will see no one else, or die here!"

"Ah," she said, in the same quiet manner; "you are not so unreasonable (I suppose I may argue this with you *now*, as you say you are much better and stronger), and can scarcely wish to degrade *me* before strangers. Anyone who insults me, insults you—at least that has been decided by the ordinary run of people in the case of husband and wife. I see that latterly you have taken some ideas into your head about me, but *still* let us keep up decent appearances."

"Insult you! that is not likely. Because he is my friend, and watches over me, *that* may be insulting you. Never mind; come back he shall! I shall not be left here helpless without someone to protect me."

"Protect you!" said she, turning on him, sharply. "These are odd phrases. What if the world heard you? Against whom, pray? Let us understand now; it is quite time. *He* held the same language. *He* must protect you, he says. So you have been talking together about this protection? What a dignified position for a wife—her own husband plotting with a stranger against her, and making these base insinuations. Who has most cause to be injured—I or you? What is all this coming to? Can I stay in this house? Look into your own conscience before accusing me."

As she stood there pouring out these words, with flashing eyes, and certainly a just resentment, he was not able to make a reply. Some justice in what she had said struck him, and he turned his eyes upon the ground.

Suddenly Patty appeared at the door with a card in

her hand. There was awe in Patty's voice, which covered the brusque and scarcely respectful manner with which she addressed her mistress—

“A gentleman's below—a lord, he says.”

“Oh, Lord John !” said Mrs. Lepell, hastily, and turned to leave the room.

Again the invalid's eyes flashed, and he half rose ; then sank back wearily.





CHAPTER XI.

A FRIENDLY WARNING.

“**M**Y dear child,” said Lord John, gaily, “how are you? Here I am after hunting the whole town for you. Beating up every cover from this to Temple-bar. Mislaidd your address, and asked everybody. Well, my child, and how are you getting on? How is the poor dear up stairs?”

“Not at all well, Lord John; not mending *in the least*, I am afraid.”

Lord John broke into a low laugh without the least restraint. “Oh, uncommon good! You *are* one, my dear! But that’s not the point, you know. I’ll tell you what *is* the point, and what has brought me. Something for *your* good. Always the way with me, everyone’s good but my own. I suppose I shall reap as I sow, and wear my crown of glory one of these fine days along with the blessed. Do get me some strong *tea* before I begin, like a dear girl.”

“To be sure, Lord John,” she said, rising. “It is just the hour for my own.”

“Go along,” said Lord John, catching at her skirt. “What are you at, child? Do you want to make me ill? Where’s the cupboard? private lock and key. No stuff of *that* kind for me, if you please.”

“I think I understand,” said she, a little coldly. “You must let me go, please. Now I must warn you once more, Lord John, that if you come to pay me visits, you must behave with propriety, or if not, it will be very painful

to tell our servants that I am never at home when a certain gay and pleasant nobleman calls. No, no ; I am a respectable married lady, whose husband is ill, and all gentlemen must behave as they would to other ladies of their acquaintance."

"Stuff," said Lord John, rising sulkily, "*that's* your line, is it? I see ; nothing but virtue and propriety. Do you lecture me, do you, Ma'am? And I must behave myself as I do to other ladies? So I shall, by the Lord. For instance, I would not have taken the trouble of getting for *other ladies* the card I have in my pocket, and which I bullied my Lady St. Ryder out of. But there's no harm done, Ma'am. No harm in the world. She'll be glad to have it back."

"Oh, Lord John," said she, "you are so good-natured. You know I did not mean to say anything to offend you, and——"

"There's no harm done, I say. Only I *do* hate that frozen-up propriety ; and this to *me*, who know this and that and the other. Keep all that, my good child, for the soft boys whom you may have about you ; but with a man like me who has three eyes in his head, and in the crook of his little finger about as much knowledge of the world as you have in that whole head of yours, it's rather too much."

"You are angry with me, I see, Lord John?"

"Not I. I am only disgusted and impatient at having good time wasted. My dear, you are no actress. You *can't* do it. Bless you, I have seen cleverer ones than you trying that with me, and they broke down pretty soon."

"I don't want to act with anyone," said she, humbly, "indeed no. But you must admit, Lord John, the more we respect ourselves, the more others will respect us."

"Ah! There again! Indeed it's sickening. I admit no such thing. Respect ourselves—are we writing our copy-books, Ma'am? But I must go. This atmosphere don't suit me at all ; my time is too precious for preaching, so I must take myself off. Good-bye to you, pious and proper lady. I'll respect you, never fear!"

"How *unkind*," said she, sinking back in her chair, "how cruel to speak so to me. What have I done? I did not mean to do anything. If you would only listen to me, Lord John; if you knew my situation in this house, where I may say I am alone—*nearly* alone, for sickness makes people strangely morbid and sensitive and suspicious. Therefore, if I am obliged to be careful for appearances' sake, even with *old friends*——"

"Old friends of a month's friendship," said Lord John laughing, but coming back. "How good that is, eh? Well, I must say you have a kind of cleverness—though understand, for the future, you could no more match yourself against me, my dear child, than you could fly. I could just turn you round my finger, metaphorically, of course, if I laid my mind to it. Let me sip something sharp and stirring, after all this. It has given me quite a turn, to see one I thought a sensible creature going on with such pranks. I am ashamed of you. If you only heard how I have spoken of you to other fellows—only last night, old Pemberton, that battered marquess, was fumbling on about some new 'clever woman,' as *he* thought. I soon shut him up. 'I know one,' I said, 'that could buy and sell the whole pack. A woman without nonsense, none of your "Unhand me, Sir!" style. "You forget yourself, Sir;" and that infernal rubbish. Good strong sense,' I said, 'that took everything as it was meant and gave no trouble; and as for looks,' I said, 'marquess, see here. Fancy a pair of——' Well, I won't go on, as I promised to behave. There. But I declare the old badger began to look curious, and to prick up his ears. But I was too knowing. No name or address to be had from me, Ma'am. For God's sake *will* you get me a nip of something? You know well enough, my dear, for they order such things for the sick. Now you *have* it in the house, I know. No little hypocrisies with *me*, Ma'am."

Mrs. Lepell shook her head, smiled, and rose up slowly, and left the room. In a short time she returned. Presently appeared Patty with glasses and sherry. Mrs.

Lepell gave him an "arch" look, full of meaning. Lord John laughed.

"Ah! the old sense is coming back, I see. What's this?" he said, with disgust.

But there was no making her understand. His Lordship took it good humouredly.

"Now to business, as you *are* good. Look at this bit of pasteboard. There they go, full swing. (That has warmed me up; must have just one more.) The Countess of St. Ryder 'at home!' That's the cant, you know. At her grandmother's. A fine woman, though, when St. Ryder made an ass of himself and married her, solely and wholly I vow because she was a fine woman. No offence, my dear. You know there are people who can't afford such luxuries; and what was well enough in our friend up stairs, and I *will* say *laudable* in the highest degree——"

"Now, Lord John, spare me, won't you?"

"Of course it will be a regular piggery—squeeze you, squeeze me—one of their beastly herring-barrel packings. Dry throats all night, and some wretched thin stuff to cool them with. But I needn't tell you it's all the proper thing, right people in the right place; Ambassadors, Mufti Bey, and the whole gang. The notion sickens me, so it does. So, by your leave, my dear Madam, once more——"

"This is quite kind of you, Lord John," she said. "I hope you will make yourself at home and come to see me—now and again, that is; but not too often."

"Now why not, Ma'am? Tell me that, please."

"Oh, I am quite serious. You don't know how strangely situated I am, Lord John, and *how careful I must be*. Illness, as you know, makes people strangely sensitive, and it is our duty to bear; 'twill humour such ideas, however unjust or unfounded they may be. No matter, too, what suffering they cause us, or what sacrifices they entail on us."

Lord John shook his head in an amused way. "Go on, my dear: I am listening; I understand. So I am not to come?"

"I am quite serious, Lord John ; only now and again. Things will be said and reported—even the servants ; and do you know—you must not be angry, though—they have told that you are such a dreadful and dangerous man to know ; they have indeed."

"But you don't believe that, dear," said he, in a wheedling tone. "Come, now, say it doesn't, poor leetle frightened ting, dat can't take care of itself."

She coloured. "Lord John——"

"That is so helpless, de great big naughty lord will come and eat it *all* up ! Upon my word, my dear, you are getting a little tedious, and do you know, I think not so sensible as I thought at first. 'Pon my word, no. Do you know what you remind me of?—that pretty, knowing creature that came out ten years ago with good effect. What was this her name was ? God bless me, I hope my memory is not beginning to go. A very pretty creature she was—ah, Charteris—Mrs. Peter Charteris."

"Thank you, Lord John ; a very nice compliment."

"Wait, though. She was as smart a little fool as ever put on a gown, though she didn't think so. Well, I noticed her at first, and took her up, and thought at one time of 'making her,' as my dear French say—for the husband was as vulgar a mass of flesh as you ever saw, and I *would* have made the creature, only she took to going on with those ridiculous childish tricks and co-quettings—humbuggings, which any fool can see through. It was every minute—'Oh, Lord John, I can't see you here, and I can't see you there,' and 'my husband this, and my husband that.' Not that I minded it a half-penny when it went on between her and me : but, egad, when she took to saying all this stuff to other people, and mincing out her nonsense, all the time delighted, you know, egad ! Ma'am, *c'était autre chose*. I am not *that* sort of fry. I don't care a sou for all the women ever born : but I don't choose to have them talking over me. I soon gave her a lesson. Why, Ma'am, I told the whole thing to everybody, right and left, up and down, before her and behind her. I called her the sweet model wife, the domestic virtues, the shepherd and shepherdess,

and we all joked Charteris, a bone in whose skin she didn't like, until he got perfectly sick of it. Our fun was forcing them together. It was 'My dear Charteris, let me introduce you to a sweet pretty girl, fresh from the country, dying to know you,' and we'd lead the soft fellow straight up—to his own wife. And at a dinner which a lively young married lady of my acquaintance gave, we contrived a droll mistake, a mistake on purpose, that on going down to dinner the husband had to take the wife. There was no remedy, egad, for they were the last left sitting, so they *had to*, by Jove——. As the Frenchman says, you know, it's only ridicule that kills; and, egad, we soon had 'em fighting and tearing like cat and dog, and it ended badly, I can tell you, Mrs. Lepell. She rued the day, my dear. Fact is, I am not a man to be played tricks with. There—after that long speeching, I am entitled to another—eh? Fairly, I think."

As his Lordship told this little narrative, he seemed to gloat over the punishment, and for the moment a very fiendish expression came into his eyes. It was not unnatural that Mrs. Lepell should be alarmed by the change in one she had always taken to be merely a gay, light man of the world, with no harm in him. She remained silent.

Lord John looked at her sideways as he sipped his brandy, and smiled to himself, with great satisfaction. "What! ruminating, my dear," he said, gaily. "Come, look up a bit; life is made for enjoyment. Now, I'll tell what has been turning over in my head—a little plan for you. Here you are, come to town. As you say yourself, in a very painful position, and having to suffer a great deal. I feel for you; I do indeed, and should like to see you amuse yourself, have something to take off your thoughts. Hang it, it is not to be expected that a lady in all the freshness of her charms; bright as the—what's his name—should be turned into a day nurse, or a night nurse. It would be a shame, an infernal shame, and I won't stand by to see it. And if you behave properly, soberly, and decently," added his Lordship,

waggishly, "I'll be glad to do my poor little all to amuse you and divert your mind."

"Oh how kind, Lord John," said she, gratefully.

"Not at all. Now we'll make a beginning with this party at St. Ryder's. It will show you a little of the world. I'd like to see you take your place—which you never will do with our sick friend up there—and shine in society, Ma'am. And observe, *I* won't do this. I know my catechism of proprieties by this time. It don't do to have a virtuous young creature brought out under the wing of a depraved fellow like me. No, no ; I'll get the women to do it. St. Ryder, between you and me, a poor weak thing, with no character (I mean *of course* in a metaphysical way), I'd like to see *her* refuse. She'll introduce you. Now, what d'ye say to me?"

Mrs. Lepell's eyes sparkled. Here was delicacy and thoughtfulness. The only thing she was thinking of.

"What *can* I say, Lord John, except that you are kindness itself. How shall I prove my gratitude?"

"How shall I prove my fiddlededee ! You must come well got up, though. Make our friend in the hospital look out. Seriously, go to a fashionable woman—with the best cut and all that—and come out flashing, and do credit to our family. I must go now. I declare I don't know why I take such trouble for people, only to be met with ingratitude, I am sure. I think I must be going to die—and transfigured. Good-bye, my dear. Bless me, how long I have stayed !"





CHAPTER XII.

A CONFERENCE.

IN the fashionable diary and memoranda which filled a column in the fashionable journal, had been, for several weeks, this announcement—
“Monday, the Marchioness St. Ryder’s. *The Dansante*, North Audley Street.”

They were well-known and fashionable people, who gave their two dances regularly every season, and went through the work in a cold, stately, and reluctant way, as if it were a painful duty, and a mere homage to their rank. They took their pleasure sadly, like true persons of condition. There were daughters, the Ladies Raby, and a son, Lord Gewaine, a hopeful heir; but they were not rich for “lords.” His Lordship, the Most Noble Marquess St. Ryder, had spent a vast deal of money, and so had his Lordship’s father, in dicing and horse-racing, and other pastimes no less costly in the end, and the estates were dipped sadly. But on the whole this dipping process affects persons of quality like the St. Ryders very little, and it seems to have all the bracing effect of the process from which the metaphor is taken. The young heir of the house was the only one who seemed to enjoy life; he was quietly adding to the future embarrassments of the family, though at present no inconvenience was felt: and Lord John, his worthy uncle, encouraged him privately and publicly, in a half-earnest, half-jocose fashion, something in this strain:—

“That’s it, my lad; don’t spare the governor! *He*

didn't spare you, nor won't : nor for that matter, did his father him. It's only the low, scurvy rascals out of the street that scrape and spare and save. I like to see a lad launching out." At the same time it must be mentioned that some years before, his Lordship, seeing how matters were likely to go, and finding there was delay and excuses setting in regularly on payment of the interest of his twelve thousand pounds' "child's portion," came to tell them one morning in a pleasant business way that he had been obliged to "put the screw" on, and had instructed his solicitor to see that the money was paid to him in bulk. "My dear fellow," said the friendly creditor, "I can't afford compliments ; you know it is life and death to me. I must have my little jaunt to Paris, and my little suppers at Vefour's, and something to pay for a bottle of champagne for my nice young friends from the theatres. So, egad, it may be paid up, and no excuses." And, egad, to use Lord John's own expression, paid up it was, at sad inconvenience to the over-burdened St. Ryder family, for whom the family solicitor "made out" the money ; and there was no feud—Lord John saying he was not "ass enough" for *that*—to have the fools of the town going about working their senseless jaws on the St. Ryder scandals—God knows there was enough of them already ! And, further, though Lady St. Ryder spoke bitterly of the infamous behaviour of her brother, who had all but ruined them, Lord John would *not* quarrel, and came and went, and even invited himself to dinner with the most unfailing good humour or indifference, until they gave up the show of resentment from sheer weariness.

On this principle, too, he had secured those invitations for his favourite female friends, taking up off the table a batch of blank cards, and saying, "You must give me these, my dears. Egad, if you don't, I'll go out into the highways and byways."

"Indeed we can do no such thing ; we are crowded up enough already."

"Well, one can make no difference ; so I'll just walk in about eleven o'clock with little Petipas, that keeps the

fruit shop, on my arm. She'll look as well as any of your ladies here ; egad, she will ; and behave, too. By the Lord, you may look out for the pair of us." Enough was known of this relation to be certain that he was quite capable of putting his threat into execution. He was therefore allowed to take what cards he pleased. "And see here, my dear sister," he added, as he put them into his pocket, "of course you'll be civil to 'em—mind that. I'll keep my eye on you ; and these creatures of yours must get them men, and that sort of thing."

It was a busy day for Mrs. Palmer in her little mansion. The widow lady who rented the house was often strangely mystified as to who and what were her lodgers. There was something about the mother that she did not like—a cold business-like hardness—and a demand of her full pound of flesh in all their dealings. But to the daughter, always tender, gentle, and soft to her, she felt herself strangely drawn. They seemed to know few people, and got a letter only now and then, and this was a foreign one ; and they had no visitors beyond two gentlemen—that coarse, free and easy lord who came pretty often, and the "fine handsome young man," who was plainly "courting" the young girl, and who seemed latterly so sad and overcome with his troubles. Something, too, was "between" that young couple, for which the old lady had a deep sympathy ; and she was grieved to see this suspension of their friendship, especially as she had noted an air of trouble over Miss Palmer's brilliant cheeks. She would, indeed, have liked to have learned all this, for there was a sort of mystery about her lodgers : but Mrs. Palmer was a lady who was not to be thus approached. She could put on a hard, cold, defiant manner—offensive also, as it was defensive ; she knew how to keep people in her place ; and besides, paying her rent regularly, was entitled to take such a tone.

One of these afternoons the landlady found Miss Palmer alone ; her mother had gone out to make purchases for the great festival. The good woman was

struck with her downcast air as she read, and with a soothing manner drew near to her.

"My dear Miss," she said, "I am sorry to see you in this way. But it will all come right, take an old woman's word for it. I have seen plenty of life, and genteel, too, though I *do* let lodgings. And though there may be a cross or two now, it won't be so by-and-by. That's all in the regular course, as I well know."

Miss Palmer was a proud girl, and reserved; she saw in this a bid for confidence.

"I want nothing to come right again," she said. "I am quite content as things are. Indeed, I do not quite follow you——"

"No matter, my dear, it's all one. But you are going to the party to-night, and as I tell you, I have seen more life than you think. I know what can be done, and what has been done, at parties, and, trust an old woman, they are the sure places in all the world for a making up. Before you go three steps into the room you will see him there."

The colour came into the young girl's face: her eyes glittered at the receipt of this confidence.

"What!" she said eagerly, "you know this—he has told you—he has sent you?"

The landlady was grieved at this mistake.

"No, my dear," she said, sadly, "I know nothing; but I am as sure as if I did know."

The disappointed face made her yet more grieved. The young girl saw her mistake, and that she had betrayed her heart. Her confusion and trouble joined, quite overcame her, and the landlady saw tears in her eyes, and heard a stamp of impatience from her foot. The defence of pride was broken down and useless, and in a low voice, she said, half to herself—"What am I to do?—if I only knew!"

Two women together — and such a situation — was there not a sure opening for confidence and comfort? Difference of station did not interfere. The landlady in a few minutes knew all—at least something more than she had known before.

"Indeed I do not know what to do. I feel for him, but he thinks I do not; but I have my dignity and pride—why does he mistrust me? Why does he judge me so harshly—so cruelly, so unkindly? He thinks, since he has met with misfortune, that we are turning against him, when, in truth, I never, never felt so towards him as I do now. It is he who has turned against me. Since these troubles he has been so harsh and unkind, and charges me with loving these dreadful parties——"

"My dear Miss Palmer, trust an old woman who has seen a good bit of the world"—our landlady was very partial to this little form of reminiscence—"that is always the way—that must be so. When the world goes against us, we get suspicious and sensitive, especially men. I believe—and that's *my* experience—women get softer and more patient under these things. I don't know how it is accounted for, I am sure."

The good woman was making a very just remark, and was a more acute observer of human nature than she fancied. For while our lords of the creation grow furious as their creation gives them inconvenience, their gentle ladies accept whatever troubles come in their direction, and indeed interpose, as much as their feeble strength will allow, to shield the annoyance from their masters. Both, the philosophers will say, are acting according to their instincts. But this view did not comfort the young girl.

"I care for parties! I thinking of anyone but him! Why it is a penance—a misery. The saddest drudgery. I would give worlds to stay at home."

"Then why not, dear, if you like it, and if *he* likes it?"

"Oh! that is the reason," she said, with a haughty toss of her head, "he suspects and orders and threatens me. If he indeed had confidence, he would see and feel what I would do to show him how much—but no; I *must* go. As he put it in that way, I *must* show him I am free, and at all risks."

The old lady grew much interested in the account of this bit of true love. It brought back to her some-

thing akin that had happened—well, ever so long ago now.

“I don’t know,” she said, gravely, “but that you are right, my dear Miss. It don’t do exactly giving way to the gentlemen, nor are they the better pleased that you do so. To-morrow he might be in a bit better humour. Ah! I could tell you about that.” And indeed what prompted this advice, was a certain recollection very sweet to think of in these old days, of a passage where a gentleman had been concerned, and in which the same tactics had been attended with success. Not final, it may be said, sadly; for the landlady was still a maiden.

The young girl was interested and encouraged. “There,” she said, “there is the woman come with my things. Let her come up here to me.”

That evening dressing set in about four o’clock. The occasion was one of unusual splendour. The preparations were not complete until past eleven. Their hair-dresser and milliners were gone. This room was left an elegant wreck. The good landlady and her waiting-women were absorbed, and shared heart and soul in the glory of the night, shared also bodily; for they stood out in hall and on stairs to see their ladies go down. A female friend was admitted to this private view, and hung back under cover of the shadow. The passers-by stopped idly to see the “splendid girl” pass, “flashing” as she swept by them.

But among these was a figure wrapped in a great coat, who waited on some steps at the other side of the street—waited impatiently for three quarters of an hour and more. The carriage was no evidence that all was finally concluded. “No,” he said, as he paced up and down impatiently, “I will not believe it. She is not like the rest—cold and heartless. She knows how much depends on this night, and she will not make it an open defiance. She loves me in her heart. I know she does—and yet——” He was thinking how unlikely it would be that she would go so far as to help him in the brusque, generous, and noble way, he had had experience of that day. “A bit of true, *true* nature *that*,” he said enthusi-

astically, "and worth all the conventional pride of the genteel. There are people," he thought bitterly, "who would have died sooner than have made so ungenteel an offer." These were his meditations—on the dark side of the street.

Suddenly the hall door opposite opened. There was a glow of light. His heart beat. This was nothing, for here was Mrs. Palmer coming out. She might be going alone, and was quite independent enough of her daughter to go out alone. There was a long delay. *She* was true, after all. Ah! of a sudden down goes hope, suspense, confidence, love; there she was, floating out in the light, careful of her steps, careful of her dress—decked out, brilliant; a monument of decorative industry. It mattered not what she was now! That fatal progress down the steps had ended all for ever.

"I am glad of it," he said, as he walked away. "I wish everything was settled in this way—yes or no—now or for ever. For life or for death. I like decision of this kind;" and he hurried on to the club, little dreaming that another matter was to be settled that night—or morning rather—in the same clear and decisive way.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE ST. RYDERS "AT HOME."



OUTSIDE the St. Ryders', who lived in an admirable quarter in one of the small streets off Park Lane, was a din and racket, a rumbling of wheels — a clatter of horses' feet pulled up suddenly — an angry flapping of steps let down with the almost contemptuous violence which the gentlemen who stand behind affect — a swinging of heavy chariots as "lovely burdens" shake and rustle themselves into shape—a flashing and rocking of fiery lamps as the huge argosies "pay off" into the night—a shouting for others to beat up—and a stoppage of passengers and humble wayfarers, with burdens on their backs, to whom the recurring glimpses through the open door of halls, basking in light, and of spiritualised footmen whose powder seemed a "glory," and whose wings were folded up under their livery—seemed a vision like a dream or a snatch out of a pantomime seen from the gallery. Standing together, rising out of the darkness in their long white coats, like gentlemen of a guard, these noble attendants were heard asking their friends if it was "a 'eavy night at St. Ryders'?" Inside it certainly was "heavy," and in this popular sense, these *elegans* had used the right word. The stair was packed close with an ascending and descending stream. Everyone was hurrying in; everyone was hurrying away. Everyone was squeezing up with sweet smiles of welcome and delight at having got there — the matron leading, as "cut-

water"—to use the sea term—of her party, and throwing off the waves right and left. A smile with a caoutchouc property, distending as an object showed itself, contracting mechanically into sadness. The smiles behind were all buoyancy and childish rapture, sisterly affection, that needed arch whispers and sly jests to expand, but which had the strange quality of the same material of instantly shrinking back—into serious; a procession whose elements were all of this pattern, was carelessly passing up and down. Dramatic action, mental or physical, is the secret of enjoyment; and in such a passage there must be endless variety and fluctuation of surprise, joy, and disappointment. There is the pride of difficulties overcome, of sudden extrication, when all hope seemed fled, and the happy fruition and final beatific vision at the top of the stairs. It is only on such grounds that our packed parties—"squashes," as they have been called even by charming lips—are endured for an hour. All find their account in it.

The Countess of St. Ryder, who was "at home" that night, poor soul! quite answered Lord John's description, as she stood there, a faded, timid lady of quality, who had no interest in anything that went on. It was nothing that "she could not say *bo* to a goose," as Lord John told her often to her face—a test that decided little one way or the other. But she could not say *no* to her husband, sons, or daughters; or indeed to any resolute acquaintance. There she stood at the top of the stair receiving the castaway guests as they struggled out of the billows, and set foot on dry land. It was as good as a farce, Lord John said ("just stay here, my boy, and watch!") to watch the pettish sour faces, when a hand had set free the dress that was half torn off, *forcing* the vixenish springs into the charming conventional smile of welcome.

"Look at old Tow Row coming up. See, see! She'd just hit him over the eye. '*So* sorry, Ma'am.' Do it again. Oh! I vow this is a great place for human nature." But the Lord, whispering and laughing in high good humour to his friend, "Old Pemberton," suddenly

checked himself. "Here we are, I declare," he cried. Now, sister, look here ;" and he stooped down to whisper to the timid lady of the house, "Mind and look out."

The menial broke the news in a low but firm voice—"Mrs. Lepell—*Miss* Lepell!" and in a moment our Jenny, who had begun the ascent some fourteen or fifteen minutes before, emerged with difficulty from the mass. Her colour was heightened by the struggle, her good eyes glittered with the excitement, and as Lord John's eye fell upon her dress, he saw with satisfaction that she had not neglected his instructions. She wore a very pale gray silk, with a great deal of white lace, and in her hair were those unfailing scarlet flowers whose effect she knew perfectly was so suited to her face. She was nervous—as who would not be?—among these fine people *for the first time*, as she would later have no ridiculous affectation in declaring. "Before I married Mr. Lepell I never went out at all. Our family, though old and good, which is *everything*, could not afford amusement. We were brought up strictly and at home, under *our dear mother's own eyes*." Which of Mrs. Lepell's acquaintance had not heard her make this little speech—made, too, not without a pardonable emotion?

The friendly face of Lord John was the first to meet her eye.

"I was ready to faint, Lord John, only I *just* looked up, and there I saw such a kind look of encouragement."

That nobleman went through his office gravely and with great solemnity.

"Lady St. Ryder," he said, "let me introduce Mrs. Lepell. *Miss* Lepell."

The lady of the house received her graciously, and with a nervous anxiety to be gracious; Mrs. Lepell bent before her as to her queen. The eye of the noble Lord was on them both with a half-amused expression.

"Now," he said, "we're through *that*, thank God! so take my arm, and come with me through the place. Ah, here's a friend to begin with. Pem, my marquess, you know the friend on my arm?"

An elderly gentleman in a rich brown wig and a fiery

face was smiling and grinning and mumbling over the fair Jenny.

"So glad," said "Pem;" "quite happy, Mrs. L'pell. Sorry to see you with him, though. Take care of him. Bad boy, bad boy; I know him from that high. Oh, very bad!" And the marquess chattered and laughed.

"Go along, reprobate," said Lord John; "come ahead, Mrs. Le. I was obliged," he added, in a low voice, "to do that. That old Crutch would have been at our heels the whole night. Keep him off, I warn you. Here, Sir," to a fair youth, "would you be kind enough? They're going to fiddle and squeal. Oh mortal Jove! what things these Christians are! Lady Shandradan has the great Squalacci, so *we* must have her! My dear, what do you think of all this now?"

"It is charming, Lord John—dazzling!"

"So it is," said he. "I dare say you begin to think you have been here always—going out among these people always, like the actor fellow who thought he was the king, and blessed the pit." There was always a turn of this malicious waggery in the noble lord, which was only *his way*. "Where's our child? She's following. You are anxious about her, I know. Don't you love her, the little dear, and wish she never was to be married, eh? See how close she keeps to us—filial instinct. Here, Hamilton—you are doing nothing—let me introduce—Miss Lepell; Mr. Hamilton. There, now, sit down here, and let us look at the guys. Ask me any questions, my little innocent, and I'll try and answer to the best of my poor knowledge."

There were certainly some present. Almost at once Jenny picked out a stout lady, dressed in a flame coloured satin, and whose laces and ribbons, and diamonds even, seemed to fall intuitively into the shape of a great straggling round-hand word—V-U-L-G-A-R-I-T-Y.

"One of the 'queries;' eh, my dear?" said Lord John. "Why, the place abounds with them. But what made you light on *her*? Instinct about Papa Raby? Positively, I did not know she had come. *She* is a *widder*—a fine thumping widder—with her own four

thousand a year, fat and snug as herself—Mrs. Laxey. They don't know how Laxey made it; it smells of flax, between you and me. But what does that matter? I must go to her—must, really. Not a bad thing for a poor and noble pauper like me—one of *my* women, you know."

Mrs. Lepell looked a little sad, and dropped her eyes, at this revelation.

"Oh that's nonsense!" said he, "we all come to it, you know. Wouldn't she do finely as Lady John? Fill a chair like any of the titled dowagers?"

"I don't know," said she, calmly: "there is something cunning in her eyes. Who is she talking to now? Oh, yes—Lord Pemberton."

"Nonsense! So she is," said Lord John, straining through his glasses. His eyes were none of the best *now*. "Nonsense! Old Crutch, indeed! Just like him. See, she's looking to me. I come, my love; I come, sweet angel," and his Lordship rose, and went over hastily.

The St. Ryders—not caring in the least for music, but music being in fashion—had hired the usual opera people. Picini, the robust Italian tenor, from the chief Royal Opera; Pacquetbot, the famous French sweet tenor, who had some years led in the soft and ravishing line, but was broken down; Madame Karoly; and Kremski, the Polish prima: for most of the *Italian* singers were Germans, Hungarians, &c.—all, of course, *à la mode*. There was besides, a humble harmonium player, of no name, but who made that wonderful instrument discourse with exquisite feeling and expression; and a *small* violin player of the same class, who had tone, feeling, and expression, but who could *not* transform human fingers into cat's claws, or suppose that tearing, scratching, and convulsive clutching and "plucking" was the soul of true playing. All these artistes sat together on view. The Polish lady—whose look and behaviour were as dashing, wild, and spasmodic as her voice—had been chartered, it was whispered through the room, at *forty guineas* for two songs: twenty apiece, my dear, ten shillings a bar!" I do not believe this, neither did Mrs.

Lepell, for she saw Lord John talking a great deal to this strange piquant, half-savage creature, whose face had a Calmuck twist, and whose hair was "touzled" in a sort of barbarous fashion. Lord John now and again gave a little bachelor feast to a few ladies and gentlemen—strange, but lively little meetings—select, even in their unselect way: so it was not very improbable that he could have arranged with his barbaric friend on easier terms.

The official prima donna had sung her songs. Indeed the programme was a good deal spent. But the French tenor was about to chant his sweet ballad, which he sung everywhere at these drawing-room concerts with great pathos and sensibility. He *had* been a "handsome creature," with a sweet *petit maitre* beauty; but now his hair was thinning like his voice. We read in the programmes—

"Ma Grandmère !"

Parlos et musique de

BALLADE.

Gustave Necker.

M. PACQUETBOT.

It was a little story. The soldier who had been picked up an orphan, and nurtured by his *grandmère*—with a little *refrain* at the end, to sweet and pathetic music:—

"Ah ! que ce jour approcherait

Plus doux que miel,

Quand je dois rejoindre

Ma Grandmère au ciel !

Ma Grandmère ;

Ma Grandmère !

Rejoindre ma Grandmère au ciel !"

The conscription came, and Pacquetbot (for he *really* identified himself with the part) had to join the army, and leave his *grandmère*. Then the war-cry was heard to inspiring music—"aux armes !" But he would come back, and with glory rejoin his poor old *grandmère*; or at least, if that were denied—(pause, and resolution of chord into key of refrain)—then :

" Ah ! que ce jour approcherait
 Plus doux que miel,
 Quand je dois rejoindre
 Ma Grandmère au ciel !
 Ma Grandmère ;
 Ma Grandmère ! re !
 Rejoindre ma Grandmère au ciel ! "

Finally he does come back, but what he had foreboded with so strange a presentiment had all come about. Entering the village, he hears that his *grandmère* was indeed gone. She was in the churchyard, to which Pacquetbot at once took his way. The man had so identified himself with the part, his voice became agitated, and he had tears in his eyes. What resource was left?—nothing but (in a broken and sobbing voice) to wait for the happy day (and in resolution of the chord, and so get into the refrain for the last time, the accompanists giving "a run" more like a flutter—but on this occasion only whispered, and with bated breath)—

" Ah que ce jour approcherait
 Plus doux que miel,
 Quand je dois rejoindre
 Ma Grandmère au ciel !
 Ma Grandmère ;
 Ma Grandmère ! re !
 Rejoindre ma Grandmère au ciel ! "

The last utterance of the word "*grandmère*" faltered, given "*à voix entre-coupé*," could scarcely be heard. It was a sigh—breathed away until it became inaudible. There was modulated applause.

Young Hamilton, standing in the doorway, said, contemptuously to his friend Halliday, "I'm sick of that fellow. He has drivelled that thing the whole season. He goes from house to house with it like a street-singer." Yet Pacquetbot, as it seemed to Mrs. Lepell, and to better judges than Mrs. Lepell, deserved more credit; for his voice had long since fled, and he had the surpassing art, which foreign artists only possess, of supplying, by mere taste and skill in articulation, the want of voice and even air, putting an agreeable cheat on our ears.



CHAPTER XIV

STRANGE NEWS.

SUDDENLY Mrs. Lepell, abandoned by her friend, saw, not far away from her, Mrs. Palmer and her daughter. They were sitting by themselves—and apparently knew nobody. Mrs. Palmer, with a discontented air, was looking restlessly round; but Miss Palmer, brilliant as she was, appeared strangely dejected. She was not thinking of the Pacquetbot nor of his "*grandmère*," but perhaps of what folly there was in a foolish pride, and would have given worlds to be at home once more. Suddenly she caught sight of Mrs. Lepell, whose eyes were on her, watching curiously and with a sort of triumph, and in an instant she had recovered herself, and looking over with a reciprocal haughtiness, seemed again to take interest in what was going on. Yet a sudden instinct had told her at that moment—a sudden light that was in the other's eyes seemed to proclaim it—that *the* Mrs. Lepell who was looking at her had something to do with her troubles. It came on her like conviction. It was as though a challenge had passed between the two, and Jenny's look seemed to say, "I know wherefore—and I am the reason—he is not here." But Mrs. Lepell was in good spirits this night, and was not one to carry on petty feuds: for in society, she said, they brought with them no end of awkwardness and restraint, to the parties themselves and to others. So she went up to both ladies very graciously, and even humbly. Mrs. Palmer knew not how to receive

her, meaning to be cold and distant ; but she sat down on a seat beside them. She asked after " our friend, Mr. Severne. You see him every day, I suppose. Indeed he *wants* your sympathy, and *all* our sympathy, now. He was with me only yesterday, and I think we should all be as good and as kind to him as we can be, for he is sensitive now, as the world is turning against him ; but he told me, I *think, you were not to be here ?* "

Mrs. Palmer, woman of the world, struck in, across her daughter, who in great confusion could not answer—

" We have not much to do with Mr. Severne. We do not *profess* to be so *intimate*, nor would he wish *sympathy* to be intruded on him. We are mere acquaintances."

" Why, I thought," said Mrs. Jenny, opening her eyes wide, " I thought all sorts of things. First, that charming Miss Palmer here—at least I thought, down at Digby (ah ! that was not a happy time for me, though everyone else enjoyed themselves !) that you told me——"

" Never !" said Miss Palmer, with trembling lip ; " you mistake. Mr. Severne and we are mere acquaintances. He has been kind to us, but only as an acquaintance."

" Who on earth is this," said Lord John, who had come up, " that you are so longing to cut and disclaim ? "

" Poor Mr. Severne," said Jenny. " (I suppose I may tell.) I really thought, Lord John—and *you* were at Digby, too — that everything had been delightfully settled."

" Not it," said he ; " Miss P. has too much sense. But I know the reason—Lord John's behind the scenes, eh ? This night will settle somebody's hash—I name no names—settle it handsomely ! And I am glad of it. Infernal, impudent, stuck-up fellow ! turning up his nose at our parties—too good for him. Never mind, he'll be in a nice way, by-and-by, and glad to turn a mangle like Mantalini. Hush, children ; what, in the name of mischief, have they got jingle-jangles in here for ? Why, we're not going to strike up psalms, are we ? And that fiddler fellow going to squeak and scrape, is he ? Now hush, my dears, for the good music !" Many ladies were

infinitely diverted at Lord John's well-known humour, and looked round with their daughters, to *show* him they were laughing.

It was the harmonium, violin, and violoncello ; and the piece was no other than what may be considered the most popular piece of music in Europe. Go where we will—to the concert in the great city, to the house where together sons and daughters play music—to the Kurhaus on the Rhine, where the jaded gamblers turn in to hear a snatch of soothing music—the “MEDITATION” which Gounod dreamed out of Bach's famous “PRELUDE” attends us with charming bewitchment and a frequency that never tires. All credit to the older immortal master for that lump of ore, so rich, so fruitful, so abounding in raw treasures of harmony ; no less honour to the modern master, who came, and, like some exquisite and cunning Cellini, worked this rich gold in an exquisite shape. Never was there such a charming union of ripe, old, and unfashionable, and of new and modern masters, of what is rich and fantastic, of wiry keys and sonorous string and rich “ogue,” of science for the learned, of air and tune for the less skilful. Hark to them now commencing ; the soft invitation of piano in soothing velvety pattering of notes, accompaniment that is yet no accompaniment, with the song of the violin now stealing on, in long-drawn notes. It is religious and yet mundane—severe yet romantic—it warms and grows passionate, lifts up its voice with a cry, and ends as it began, falling off into sadness and weariness and resignation, drooping into the original placid companionship of the piano, and seeming to finish finally : when with new auxiliary, rich and gorgeous to the ear, satisfying, it recommences its stately march again. What lavish embroideries ! what rich heavy material. We would have it swept before us again and again ; recommence and recommence, and never tire.

Looking to its appreciation with Lady St. Ryder's company, it was considered a tedious business enough. Lord John put his lips together to make a contemptuous face, and said to a gentleman friend something that

sounded like "Rot." "Think of a reasoning Christian," he said later, "wasting his life squeaking a horse's tail over something out of a cat. And this is the nineteenth century, my friend! I must go and take a little woman, I've got here, down to feed, or she will be clawing me." And the noble Lord, who was in great spirits to-night, bustled into the room again to find Mrs. Lepell. He found a little change in the general disposition. For into the place next to her had settled himself the ancient marquess, who was grinning and "goggling" terribly, tiring his old muscles with what *he* considered animation and vivacity. "Confound his old bones," said Lord John, audibly. "Come down with me, Mrs. L.," he said; "have some of their messes and mixtures below; d'ye hear me?"

"Egad, I can't have that, Raby," said the old marquess. "Just asked myself, and been refused. Snubbed, begad. So don't expect she'll take you and leave me—no, no—that can't be."

"Come down," said Lord John, roughly, and putting out his arm, "don't mind *him*."

She was naturally greatly embarrassed. "What am I to do, Lord John?" she said; "the marquess will be offended. I am afraid I *must* stay here."

"Must you indeed?" said Lord John, spitefully. "Dear me. Quite besieged, I suppose. Poor little soul, worried out of her life—afraid of setting the gentlemen by the ears—isn't that good? I say, Pem, come with me. I have a whisper for you, my dear boy. Something in your line. A right good thing about little——. I'll tell it you in the supper-room when we're cooling our throats."

The old marquess went irresolutely, casting a look at our Jenny, who thus found herself deserted by both her noble admirers. There was a look of significant malice in Lord John's eyes. The worst was that as she turned round, biting her lips, she saw quite close behind her the stout glowing Lady Digby, and Sir Parker, who had been dining out, and had come in late. Both had seen the whole little scene, and Lady Digby was tossing her great head-dress, which seemed like a hair turban, with

haughty enjoyment. Mrs. Lepell's face took the shape of what may be called *suspended* recognition. But a stony gaze met hers. Sir Parker looked away; but he was very close to her, so she could not help saying, "How do you do, Sir Parker?"

The Baronet, moving restlessly in his seat, muttered something, as it were to himself, then rose. Strange behaviour. There was a pause in the music; so the ladies and gentlemen about her, idle, disengaged, wondered exceedingly. From the beginning indeed our Jenny had attracted the marked attention of her neighbours. They had not been unmindful of the little scene between her and the two lords. The ladies looked at her with hostility, according to their fatal phrase, as "a person." They saw how "forward" she was, and how that forwardness had been properly checked. Above all, they saw the "nice" daughter, melancholy, forlorn, hopeless, dressed as for a show and sacrifice, in whose soft sad eyes were thoughts far away—thoughts of wonder and consternation and bewilderment at what her companion was busy with. *She* could understand nothing of the acquaintances, the familiar easy terms with which these gentlemen came to them. She was scared and helpless.

Mrs. Lepell seemed to know what was in the minds of all about her, and looked from one to the other as if in defiance. Her cheeks looked brilliant; no one came to her. She was abandoned.

"Come away, do come away," whispered the young girl. "Papa will be waiting, and lying awake. Let us leave this dreadful place."

"Presently, presently, dear," said Mrs. Lepell, sweetly; "as soon as we can get away quietly. We *can't* be rude, dear. You are not enjoying yourself. Why, it is for your sake we came, dear." The ladies who thought her "a person" were looking at each other. "Of course, if you *wish* it."

She was still looking for some one. That person was not on the landing. She and her companion went down the stairs timorously—two unprotected ladies it must be recollected. The young girl thought she was going away.

They looked into the supper-room—then into the cloak-room—then in the hall. They were stopped by a crowd coming in and going away, with the hall-door wide open—and saw a strange man in a white coat standing resolutely on the mat, with a letter stretched out to a powdered servant, who was earnestly expostulating with him.

“I can’t do it,” said the powdered menial. “You must go away. I couldn’t do it. I could no more go looking about in the crowd for a person of the name of Palmer, than for Smith or Jones. It’s out of the question——”

“I tell yer,” said the white coat, “it’s of himportance, and I was told to give it, and see that it was given.”

Our Mrs. Lepell was standing close by, and heard all this. At the word “Palmer” she started. She was quick at resolution, and in a second put out her hand, took the letter and looked at it. It was as she supposed; and she knew the writing.

“Quite right,” she said softly to the man; “you have done very well. Lucky I met you. Tell Mr. Severne you saw me, and gave it to me.”

The man bowed. The young girl behind—a little absent—listened wondering. Her mamma tore it open without scruple, and read it. The young girl said, half mechanically, “What is all this?”

“Only a line from Mr. Selby,” said she, carelessly.

At this moment she heard the name “Severne” repeated hastily beside her. A handsome “French officer”-looking young man, well dressed, was going away, and said to his friend, the same who had criticised Pacquebot’s sad song—

“I tell you it’s true,” he said. “I was coming out of the club, and saw the thing done. Don’t tell it, though. Poor devil, it’s enough for him.”

“And where did they take him to?”

“Usual place—Levy’s, in Church Street. I heard that much, though I kept back in the dark. Poor devil. He thinks no one saw it at all. I pity him. He’s made an awful mess of it, but may give in now.”

Mrs. Lepell understood all in a second. She sat listening to the music, which had begun again, with her clear brow working. Was she maturing a plan? She *had* it matured in a few seconds, and rose up hastily.

"Come, dear," she said. "We may go now, or *begin* to go."

She got out of the embarrassment of the blocked-up chairs, and made her way to the stair. Almost at the entrance she saw Sir Parker talking stiffly to another gentleman, something in which the words "our office" came very often. The gentleman was asking reverentially about "Digby," and "the improvements I hear you mean." But Sir Parker would sooner have stayed on the subject of the "office," to which he looked back wistfully. He heard a soft voice close beside him and started.

"Sir Parker," it said, "I want to speak to you very particularly, if you could spare me a moment."

"About what, Ma'am?" said he, restlessly. "Really I don't understand all this—why do you er-persist in this er-way?"

"It is something very particular," said she, earnestly. "You must give me an audience—an *official* interview, as you would do at your office."

This touch softened Sir Parker in spite of himself.

"Well, Ma'am," he said, dropping on a sofa, "that is all very well; but such things are settled in the regular way, by appointment, and a regular hour. Now what is this?"

In a moment she was sitting beside him, telling him her story. There was a curious look of mischief in her eyes.

"I know you will not do it for me," she said, as if pleased at the thought. "At least as a favour."

"A favour!" he said. "Oh, we can entertain nothing of—er—that sort."

"Not for a relation?" she said, looking at him steadily, and still enjoying the situation—"for a very near relation—for one whom you have been the cause, the *innocent* cause, of course, of depriving of his chances in life. I mean that poor ill-treated Mr. Severne."

"I think this is very er-wrong indeed," said he, colouring. He could not get up or leave the place as he wished to do, for there had come a dense crowd in front—wedged up—and impassable. Mrs. Lepell almost smiled at his ludicrous but impotent efforts.

"Surely, Sir Parker, you are a humane gentleman, and I am told a kindly one, that would do all that is proper and correct. Just one second. What if this poor fellow was in sore distress at *this moment*, beset by *duns*—bailiffs, even—surely, for the credit of the *house of Digby*, of *which you are now the head*, you would, out of your abundance——"

"Indeed I would do nothing of the kind—nothing whatsoever of the kind. (Would you stand back a little, Sir?) No mistake about it. Discredit indeed! What discredit is there about him to affect me? How, indeed? Worthier fellows have been seized on by bailiffs. As he has made his bed, so he must lie in it."

"You are not serious, my dear Sir Parker," she went on with the same almost bantering tone. "Why, look here. Listen to a little secret I have heard actually since I came into the room, Sir Parker, that such is the case, actually and truly, at this moment. Is it not dreadful, Sir Parker? I was only speaking in parables, just to break it to you. But really there is not a moment now to be lost. Those dreadful beings whose touch is contamination, have touched him; there is no doubt of it."

"And who does doubt it, Ma'am? What is it to me, or a hundred stories like it? I don't care twopence. If I was to be relieving all the dissolute spendthrifts of the country, a nice time I should have of it."

"But your relative—have you no heart, Sir Parker?"

"He's no relative. I repudiate him altogether, wipe him out *in toto*, certainly since this business. There's my lady looking. Really the crush here—and altogether-er, Mrs. Lepell, I must request-er that this will-er althogether cease. As for you, Ma'am——"

"Wait a moment, yet, then," said she, in quite an altered tone. "I have not finished yet. I have something more to tell you. You have not managed cleverly

on the whole, Sir Parker. You should, have made me a friend from the beginning. An official like you, with eyes, would have conciliated. I might know more than you think. Instead, I have had to put up with a series of insults from you and your lady."

Astonishment struck him speechless. He sat with his hands resting on the sofa, as he had begun to rise, but without rising.

"I know more than you think—plenty—too much; yet I might have given you a chance: I might indeed, now I shall not. It is too late. Bend down close, Sir, unless you wish me to tell it aloud to the whole room."

During this startling communication, there were people who noticed the two faces. That of Mrs. Lepell, indignant, flashing, angry, and denouncing; that of the Baronet, pale, confounded, aghast, and shrinking. An old man about town said, "Egad, some one should call my Lady Digby, he's getting a dressing here." Sir Parker knew by a sort of instinct what all this was pointing to. It had often hung before him; he had often suspected and dreaded and wondered and *searched* too; quite under a spell of terror. He did as he was bid, and stooped down his head. What she whispered was what he had anticipated.

"I know what you will think," she went on, "and what you will say, that this is a trick, an invention; wait only till to-morrow morning, and you will, I give you my solemn word—oath, if you like—know that it is true. But if you would purchase any indulgence, you will do what I wish to-night."

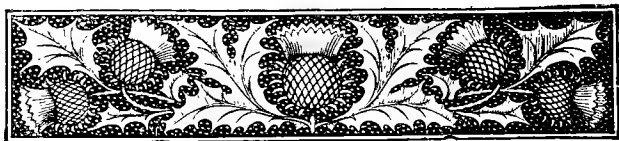
He was overwhelmed—helpless. Lady Digby had by this time made her way to him whom in courtesy we might call "her Lord." She was amazed at seeing him rising up to offer his arm to her enemy. She could hardly say, "Where are you going? What do you mean?"

"Tell her you'll be back in a moment," whispered his companion. But he could not whisper anything, but looked at his wife stupidly and helplessly.

The next day the old man about town sent abroad

everywhere that "Parker-Digby had broken out. Reg'lar batt'l royle last night at a house, saw it myself, and then—would you believe it? they went down stairs together." It was merely a gentleman sceing a lady to her carriage, and the servants at the door assumed it was Mr. and Mrs. "Chose" going home. But the old man about town was watching as well as his old eyes would help him, and he saw what was to him, "nuts, cakes and all—everything." "'Gad, Sir, she drove away with him!"





CHAPTER XV

AN ANGEL VISITOR.

SEVERNE, when he had hurried from the sight that had affected him so much, with hasty strides and compressed lips—vowing, too, that all was over for ever—hardly knew whither he should go. It seemed to him that all was indeed finally determined that night: that life itself had been exhausted, and that there was nothing left in it worth struggling for. Indeed it must be said that for a week or so the fine platitudes on which he used to lecture to his mother (“we must look our difficulties in the face;” “put our shoulder to the wheel,” &c.), had come to lose their spell. The wheel, as it almost always proves, was too large and heavy, or the shoulder too weak. In fact, one day it had begun to flash on him that it was absolutely hopeless to think of surmounting his difficulties. He was overwhelmed; his face getting sharp and worn; he was pettish and fretful. Still he put off, as it were, final conviction. Now all was over. Long was he to recollect this night. He did not know where he was going to, nor care. He kept in the streets, talking a good deal to himself, and repeating the word “ingratitude” with infinite scorn. “But I am glad it has occurred,” he said almost as often; “very glad.” He passed a theatre—a sort of cave of light, as it seemed—with every one pour-

ing in. A great screen was reposing against the door, on which were in gigantic red letters—

“THE GREAT LOCK-OUT!!

THE NEW DRAMA.

1st Tableau :

THE HAPPY HOME !

2nd Tableau :

THE TEMPTER !

THE BURNING OF THE FACTORY!!!

Witnessed by nightly thousands, and admitted by the universal Press to be the most stupendous and startling piece of sensation ever put on a real stage ! ”

Severne read this very often, and smiled grimly as he read. He often quoted it afterwards in his scornful way. “Nightly thousands,” he said, “what a comic expression—and ‘Ever witnessed on a real stage.’ Every stage is real, you know.” He went in; but found it was a dreary, dragging thing. The writers, or constructors, had indemnified themselves for their two “sensation” scenes, by long and weary dialogues between very ordinary and uninteresting working men and working women. He sat only a short time, as he said afterwards, it was filling him with lowness every moment. Had he waited for what had delighted the nightly thousands—namely, the burning of the factory, “it would have driven me to suicide.” “Won’t you remain, Sir?” the astonished box-keeper said. “The fire scene is going to begin.” He could have half wished at that moment that they were all stifled in their own sham flames. He passed his club and went in. “I suppose they’ll begin their horse play here,” he said to himself. “If they do, by—I’ll not stand it. They’ll find I’m not to be played tricks with; and if that low giber, Callwell, dares to try anything with me——”

He stalked moodily into the rooms. He roamed about uneasily. A stray “man,” buried in his deep arm-chair, with a newspaper held over his head, looked up at him, and noted his wild eyes. He passed on, snatched up a

paper himself, flung it down, then strayed into the smoking-room; and there he saw "Callwell," the low giber, sitting with friends, enjoying his cigar, and in very high spirits, and surrounded by what Severne would have called "his toadies."

"Hallo!" called out this gentleman, in delight, and taking his cigar out; "why, here's our friend Severne. Come in; sit down, my melancholy boy, and have a cigar!—do! I mean, of course, ring, and order yourself one."

Restraining himself, the other tried to answer calmly. "I am not inclined to smoke," he said.

"Won't you sit down, then? let us see you. Why, we're all pining for you, my dear boy."

Severne took no notice of this remark, but quite calmly walked over to the fire.

"Our friend's in love, I suspect," said the other, nodding to his friends, and laying himself out for a regular feast of badgering. "She hasn't written, or has gone to another fellow. By the way, Severne, she may be at that party at Lady Roughrider's—what's this her name is?—where Monkhouse and the others went off to. By Jove, Dick, if I saw *my* Seeusan from the bottom of the stairs going in *that* way, and couldn't get up to her to punch the other feller's head, I declare I'd be very exasperated. Make your mind up, my dear boy, they're at it this moment, depend on it, tooth and nail."

This, taken as "raillery," was very poor and contemptible. But Severne heard the "fools chuckling."

"I must *request*, Mr. Callwell," he said, with a trembling voice, "that you will not make free with me or my concerns, I am not in the humour for it; and you have no such acquaintance with me as to warrant it. I warn you now, drop this line, at least towards me."

There was something menacing in Severne's manner ("Egad, the feller looked as mad as a hatter. I saw his wits were upset by his creditors, so I drew off in time, poor devil," said the jester, telling the story later). No one answered him, and Mr. Callwell, rather upset, kept staring at him with his cigar in his hand. Severne stalked

from the room, glaring defiance at them all, and looking as though he were saying, "I am ready to quarrel with anyone of you—anyone!"

He was a little pleased. "I can keep *those* buffoons in order." Alas! he did not know what was waiting for him. It was then that Hamilton and a friend, the two young "swells" who were going on to Lady St. Ryder's party, following him close, saw him go down the steps vacantly, and almost fall into the arms of two rough-coated men. There was something in the cut of the clothes of these men that made the young men pause and watch, and utter a muttered "By Jove!" They saw Severne start back with a sort of cry, and a "How dare you?" Then they saw him give an agonised and hurried glance round to see if anyone was looking. Alas! it had come at last! What many a man had prophesied in a jocular way—what many a one had declared pleasantly was the certain end of "pulling the devil by the tail"—but what Severne had never dared to let near him.

"I wish we had thought of turning away," said Hamilton, who, however, was too proud of the adventure not to tell it everywhere, and tell it minutely, "for the poor fellow's face looked so hurt when he saw that *we* saw!"

The worst had indeed come. He might cover up his head with his robe decently, and sink down pierced with wounds. This was his last stab. He could have battled against everything except this unclean touch.

Stupified and weary, almost as a matter of form, he wrote as was suggested to him. "You should have some friends somewhere. That's always the *way*, you know." Severne thought of Selby, and wrote. But Selby was away at merry balls in the country, seeing rustic life. He would not be home for weeks: and if he were, on principle would not look at a letter until about noon, even "to save the life of a dying creditor." The messenger came back. Severne had forgotten the message, and listened dulled and stupid. Suddenly he asked, vacantly, what he had not thought of doing before, the amount and the name of the creditor. It was for five hundred pounds—a judgment on a bond. He knew

now. He was not in the least surprised. Then came the thought of the two men in their ball dresses, Hamilton and Halliday. That idea went into his breast like a dagger, and gave him as sharp a sting of agony. He groaned and hid his face in his hands. "They will spread it everywhere. People will shun me as if I had the plague." He shrank from himself. *She*, his mother, must know it too. It would kill that gentle woman. Long after he thought of this terrible night, and wondered almost that his hair "had not turned grey." But a young man can bear much more than he fancies before that prodigy can be accomplished.

It was past one o'clock when he lifted his face from his hands to reply to a discontented servant of the place, who half sleepy came to tell him that there were some friends had come to him at last. Severne asked wearily and indifferently who they were, and was told it was a lady and a gentleman. That indeed made him start. His poor mother had heard—but to come to that degraded pest-house—— He started up!

"Where is she?" he cried, a little wildly. "Let her not come in here. This is no place——"

There was the rustle of a dress—a lady fluttered in and came up to him. It was not his mother's step. He rubbed his eyes. It seemed a dream. Long after, when he thought of this night, it seemed as though some heavenly vision had come down to break through the dark dusty walls, bringing light and happiness. He could almost have sunk before her; the surprise and bewilderment took away his breath. The brightest, kindest eyes beamed on him. Indeed it appeared something supernatural. For she was in her evening dress, her "low neck," flowers, and jewels. The "servants" stood open-mouthed—though they were accustomed to all sorts of strange visions there.

"I have come at once," she said. "Oh, how I felt for you! It is cruel and miserable. But I came at once to tell you that you are free."

"Free!" he said; "and you—oh, I recollect. It was you who wished to help me before. How kind—how

noble ! Why, you are some angel ! What does it all mean ?" He could indeed hardly collect his ideas.

"Sit down," she said. "Listen to me. Dear Mr. Severne, what indeed can you think of me, coming in this way ? Only that I *have* an interest in you, which——"

"Which others," he said, passionately, "have *not*. How shall I ever repay you ? I, who have been such a dull insensible fool, as not to have seen before this, or acknowledged, how good you have been to me."

"Oh, you have other friends," she said, hastily, "who would do as much. That brilliant girl whom I left behind——"

"Yes, at her party ; I know. *She* heard. They all heard, of course ?" and he waited anxiously for an answer.

Mrs. Lepell looked on the ground.

"What could she do ?" she answered. "They are poor, and of course must make their way in the world. But she was the centre of admiration."

"All that accounts for it. All of a piece !"

Again Mrs. Lepell looked down.

"She must have known, for——"

"They all knew it. I understand," he said. "Never mind ; we have done with the past."

"Yes," said Jenny, almost with inspiration. "We have done with the past. That is what I have come to tell you. Oh, you know not what good news I bring ! Oh, Mr. Severne, can you bear it ? Oh, *such* good news, and, oh, happy I that bring it !"

"Why, what is this ?" he said, bewildered, "what is coming now ? I am prepared for anything to-night."

"Then listen : I can only hurry over it. But I only knew it myself this night ; oh, and such retribution ! There is indeed a Providence !" and the generous lady's eyes wandered up to the dirty ceiling of the room. "Digby, the dear place that caused you such suffering—that you thought was lost to you for ever—Digby——"

"What ?" said he, with gleaming eyes, "not *mine* ! Go on—quick !"

"Yes, yours," said she, exulting ; "and, I must say

it, all through *me*. *That* sweetens the thought. Sir John was true after all, and I *knew* he was ; I always said so."

"But the proofs," said Severne ; "the *proofs*, dearest Jenny?" (Neither were shocked at this familiarity.)

"A will," she went on, hurrying her words—"another will, made long before, and not destroyed : preserved almost miraculously. I knew it though, and said it. That dreadful night, when I was sitting with him—and I sat *for hours*—and he talked so passionately, I tried all I could to soothe him ; for he liked me, *I think*. And when he rose to go to his room, he said almost as much as that he would wait, and had been a little hasty in destroying his will. He did indeed—before Heaven, he did ! And then I was convinced he had gone to write another."

"Well?" said Severne, breathless ; "and——"

"You remember that old book, with which you used to be so merry, and which he used to bring down and talk about—that Bishop's book, 'The Short Way ;' and you hinted, *I think* that I rather *affected* to like——"

"Oh, forgive me, forgive !" he said, hastily, seizing her hand ; "but I have so much to ask you to forgive."

"Ah ! we have done with the past, recollect," she went on. "Now listen to one of the most mysterious chances. *Who will deny there is a Providence after this ?* A few days ago, that book was sent to me, done up in paper as a legacy of *Sir John's regard for me*. I believe, and it is no uncharity to say so, that that was done out of contempt, and to wound me : for, as you know, the book is intrinsically worth but very little indeed—though poor Sir John——"

"The unmanly fellow," said Severne ; "but all is of a piece—his work to-night and all."

Jenny started genuinely. "What, *he* has done this !" Again her eyes went up to heaven. "Who will deny," she said again, "*that there is a Providence !* That book lay by me for some days. To-night, as I was dressing, I began to think of that poor, good Sir John—for *this* very dress I wore at Digby—and my eyes fell on this book ; and I took it up, and turned over the leaves.

Some sheets of paper, very old and yellow, fluttered out. It was an old will, made, I suppose, when you were a child—regularly made, signed, sealed—*two witnesses*, as I could see for myself—leaving Digby to his ‘dear little boy,’ as you were then. I made sure of meeting you at this party, or I should have sent to you without a moment’s delay. Here it is, and I cannot tell how supremely happy I am that I should have been the means of bringing such joyful news.”

Severne could only murmur, “What can I do? Oh! only show me some way! From this night make me your slave—*anything* you wish. Oh! if *indeed you were free, there would be a way*——”

“Hush,” said Jenny, looking round; “we must not even whisper *that*! All that is too late. Besides, you never—liked me from the beginning; but even for the gratitude, I am so——”

“Gratitude! no,” he said; “a thousand times no! Never liked you! I can tell you now, I always did. I always felt myself drawn towards you; but it was my own wretched vanity that made me struggle against it. I was too proud to let it be seen. I admired your grace, your wit, your surpassing powers of mind. You talk of a Providence. Yes, yes, there is one indeed. It was a providential instinct that sent you to our house. Fool that I was, I could see nothing of these things. You were raised up to be my preserver—my salvation. It would be a poor return to say that my life was henceforward at your service. I could show my love and gratitude in the way I could wish—that is, by making you a sharer in the blessings you have brought to me. But I solemnly declare, as I stand here—for I see you do not believe me—that if you were free, *that would be the least* return I could make, to offer to you myself and all that I have!——”

“Oh, what goodness!” said she, with heightened colour. “I understand all this; *we* understand it, though others might not. It makes me oh, so happy to know this! A load has been taken away from my heart. But now that you have told me this, we will let

it go into the past, and not think of it again. What is impossible, is impossible ! It is enough for me to know that I have your regard ; and, indeed," she added, with falling voice and swimming eyes, "what you have told me has made me *very* happy. I have a friend at least, which I much want."

"A friend ?—a slave !" he said passionately. "One that will be proud to be so—that longs for the opportunity."

He seemed as if he could have sank down before her. "Hush !" she said, "we must not think of this ever again. I have *my* little trials to go back to—my duties to perform. To-night will always seem like a sweet, soft dream, which I may dream again now and then ; but when awake ? No, it must all go into the past, and be forgotten."

He was going to answer eagerly, when the door opened softly, and a worn, wistful face looked in.

Severne started back. The other came up to him with an imploring look.

"It was a mistake, indeed it was. I knew nothing of it. The solicitor——"

"Leave this, Sir," said Severne, sternly. "Knew nothing of it ? What, when I came to you the other day, and I abjectly implored of you——"

"It was not my fault ; indeed no," said the other, trying to catch his hand.

"You referred me to your solicitor ; you could do nothing. Now, I refer you to mine. And I shall show you no mercy."

"What !" said Sir Parker, his dried face contracting up until it seemed about to crackle almost, "has this woman been telling you her idle story ? Do you suppose any man in his senses would accept such a transparent trick ? It's too good. I've been inquiring and looking about her. *I* have heard some things."

"Let him talk," said Jenny, softly. "I am accustomed to this. It is the regular cry. It is natural he should speak so. But here, *here* is the paper. Show it to him, Mr. Severne ; he will know the writing."

"It is false—a forgery!" said Sir Parker frantically; "a clever forgery! What judge or jury will believe you? Turn *me* out, the heir-at-law! I am in possession! And if it is, it is a sham. What is to become of me?" added the unhappy Baronet, distractedly, on whom the conviction of truth was growing, after all. "They have made me give up my place. I shall be thrown on the world to starve. But it's an imposture, and I'll prove it so."

In this way the unfortunate gentleman almost raved on, and at last withdrew; then the pair were left together again.

"I can hardly believe," said Severne, "but that I will not awake in a moment and find all a dream."

"Yes," said she, "it has been a very happy night;" then sighed. "Now I must go home; I know what waits me there, and what will be thought of all this."

He was allowed to go. Sir Parker had tried to arrange the matter—a wild and desperate appeal to compassion. But she had been beforehand. Not more than three-quarters of an hour had gone since she had left the Ryders'. They drove there. There were plenty arriving and going away. The heavy chariots were rocking, and swinging, and "banging." She got in unnoticed. She might be going away or coming; it did not matter. Almost the first she met was the worn and shrunk Sir Parker, who had come back, not daring to desert his "lady," and thinking it perhaps the safest spot to meet her. Mrs. Lepell swept by him. Up stairs she saw her charge, anxiously and wistfully waiting, with almost despair in her face. She tripped up lightly, for the party was thinning fast. She was just in time. Yet there was a glow and brilliancy in her cheeks, indescribable. No wonder, after such an exciting night.

"Oh," said the young girl, "where have you been? and poor papa, what will become of him?"

"Absurd," said her mamma; "don't talk so childishly. He has been in his bed hours."

Wicked and malicious eyes were glaring at her—Lord John's—fresh and hot from the supper room.

"What prank is this, I beg to know? Nice proper work for a person of your condition."

"Nonsense, Lord John," she said, smiling; she was indeed in spirits. "Will you take us down and get us our things? it is high time for us to go."

"What work this is," said he, a little husky and loud also, "and what cool airs! Egad, I *will* take you down. Take me down! What d'ye mean? Where have you been, I say? D'ye hear me?—I'm serious."

"I am not going to tell you my secrets, Lord John; come, dear."

"But I will have an answer, my good Madam," he said, putting himself before her, and taking hold of the banister, "and I've a right. Don't you know how it is you are among these people, or how the deuce you'd get here only for me? I tell you you quite mistake the thing altogether, and your place too. I'm answerable for the people I bring into this house, and that they behave like the other decent ladies here, and not be going with men in cabs through the public streets. I vow it's an insult to my sister and her company, and I resent it."

"Lord John, you quite forget. Let us go down, please."

"Oh, mamma, let us go home."

He relaxed his arm sulkily, and followed them, his wicked eyes glaring maliciously. He came after them into the cloak-room.

"What infernal work it is! What airs! See us down! I *did* see you down. I suppose you think I am a man that you give that sort of thing to—make me a handle to get on by. No woman has tried that game with me that I haven't *settled*—yes, and made her rue it too. What *work* it is! Infernal!"

Only the servants could hear this extraordinary burst. But they were accustomed to it on his Lordship's part, and did not mind. But ladies and gentlemen were coming in now.

She stooped over, and half whispered him—

"You mustn't speak in that way *now*, Lord John. I

can't have it. It's not proper or gentlemanly. Another time I should be angry. But *to-night*, Lord John, I am in such spirits."

"Gentlemanly! Much you know, indeed. Nice work this is. You quite forget, Ma'am, who *got* you here;" and a Lady Archer looked round amazed.

Mrs. Lepell said firmly: "Lord John, I am *afraid* you forget yourself sometimes. But we won't fight to-night, I am determined. I declare, a friend's face! Mr. Hamilton, will you take us out? And I have something to tell you."

He sprang to her with alacrity. "I have been searching for you everywhere. What is this I hear?"

She took his arm and went out. Lord John looked after her with malignant eyes, that were rather inflamed by the lamps and sitting up, and perhaps by something in the supper room.

But this wonderful night was not to end as yet. All the way home in the carriage, the young girl, strangely excited, poured out a half frantic stream of reproaches.

"You will kill him—my poor papa. He is ill, too, and excited. What does all this mean? Why do you do this, or are you doing it on purpose? I am sure there is some plan in this, and I cannot see my poor, poor ruined father destroyed in this way before my eyes."

It was dark in the carriage, so the two could not see each other's faces. Mrs. Lepell made no reply. They got home. There were lights in the windows. At the top of the stairs, the tall thin figure was standing, looking out with eyes strained, and a curiously wild look.

"You've come back at last," he said.

His daughter ran to him.

"You should not be up, dearest," she said. "This is folly and madness, and——"

"And death, you should say. I wish to Heaven it was, only that it would be the most welcome thing for some who are wishing and longing for it; but I shall disappoint them."

The candle was shaking in his hand, and he was

trembling from head to foot. It was a dramatic scene : time, gone two ; the street and house silent with the silence of advanced night, only the woman-servant, Patty, listening fearfully in the darkness at the bottom of the stair, as the shrill voice broke out fiercely and denounced the neglectful wife.

"What have I done *now*?" remonstrated the soft voice ; "been at a party with your daughter," she said this abstractedly ; yet she was wondering could he have heard anything. Yet her head was still so full of the sweet bewilderment of the adventure she had passed through, that she was really inattentive to what was going on now.

"Look, look at her," he went on, denouncing her with trembling fingers ; "*she* does not care. She can wait patiently—bide her time, she thinks."

"What have we done?" said she again.

"Ah, you think you can impose on me with that soft innocence. I know all you have been about to-night. At a party! Driving about the town, visiting strange houses. Is *that* proper?"

She started, but repeated, "What have I been doing?"

"I know, and I *shall* know more. I have friends left who will protect and aid me and watch for me, helpless as I am ; God help me ! But what should I expect, or what do I deserve? for I have brought it all on myself, and I cannot suffer too much."

He hung down his head on his breast. His daughter clung to him close, and tried to fondle him into hope and comfort.

Suddenly he turned ; his quick nervous hearing had heard something. She started too. The hall-door bell had rung. The night had been so full of strange incident, that she had an instinct that all was not done as yet. He saw this in her face as she turned hastily to go down. She heard his voice, querulous and almost frantic, behind her. She was quite indifferent now. Greater things were absorbing her. She said—

"Patty, go down, I'll open the door myself." She did so softly, and was disappointed. It was not he

whom she had expected. A letter was handed to her, and the messenger went away. She went up to her room, passing the others without a word. She opened it and knew the writing to be Severne's; it ran:—

“*Two o'clock.*”

“At home I found the enclosed telegram. You will see that I have to go away. But I shall be back soon, for I shall never forget what has happened to-night—never! Good-bye—only for a short time.”

“What does this mean?” she thought, with a pang of apprehension. She read the telegram; it ran:

“MARSEILLES.

“From W. Thomas, Marseilles, to H. Severne, London.

“Come off at once. Mr. Algernon has died of cholera. His wife is ill. My Lord wishes to see you.”

She read this, but could not understand. Who was Mr. Algernon? “My Lord” she understood. Who was “W. Thomas?” She ran to her little shelf, got down her book of heraldry, and read. Ah, now it was all clear. “Algernon” was heir to the Severne title. Algernon's wife was ill too, and Severne, her hero of that night, *then* came in. How did her eyes sparkle, and she actually fluttered the paper in exultation in the air. It was indeed a wonderful night.

BOOK THE THIRD.

DOCTOR CAMERON.



CHAPTER I.

A NEW ALIV.

IN the morning Mr. Lepell was much worse. He had not slept the whole night. Betimes the worn and anxious face of the daughter was seen about the house. She, too, had scarcely slept, but more from a sense of coming evils. When she had seen him she fluttered down.

She was going on an expedition. "I cannot see him die before my eyes," she said. She had on her bonnet and shawl, and was standing in the hall, when the study door opened, and the face of Mrs. Lepell, fresh as the morning, looked out. "Where are you going at this extraordinary hour?" she asked. But the young girl was changed also: she seemed now to be brought to bay, and with panting breath and trembling voice answered her "mamma."

"I am going for Doctor Pinkerton."

"Going for Doctor Pinkerton! not surely against my wish, though *that* is not so much matter, but *your papa's* wishes——"

"He would wish to see him; he is his friend. You must not prevent me. I am not to be stopped."

"Prevent you?" repeated Mrs. Lepell. "No, dear! there shall be no unpleasant violence, or anything of *that* kind; only I wish you to know that into this house—my house—I do not choose that doctor to come."

"I *must* go for him. After last night"—and she stopped.

"After last night. Well, pray go on."

"It is time for me to interfere. Oh! it is cruel—very cruel and wicked of you, when you know he is not to be harassed, when you see him wasting day by day, in a fever, a mortal fever, and these terrible scenes going on——"

"This is quite a new tone," said the mamma, calmly. "So you lecture me. Only please to bear this in mind. You talk of 'scenes.' What scenes, let me ask you, Miss Lepell, are you going to bring about by the amiable step you are now going to take? What confusion—what anxiety? For I have my own dignity to look to, which no one in this house seems to care for. That man insulted me. You have the whole range of the profession—the cleverest, the most famous,—and yet you insist on this Pinkerton. To what motive am I to put it down to, except one?"

This seemed indeed reasonable. But it only more excited the young girl.

"It is a friend we want. I *must* go. He is the only one——" She flew past her mamma and went out. A shade of trouble came over the other's face, and she retired into the drawing-room and sat there writing letters: one in answer to the telegram she had got last night.

In a short time arrived the doctor's carriage, containing the doctor and the young girl. "Very well," said Mrs. Lepell to herself, and waited to give battle.

"I have not come of myself," he said. "I have been sent for. But do not be alarmed; I have been thinking it over, and there is some reason in what Miss Helen has told me. Certainly the profession is open to you; there is plenty of talent and ability in town: I don't want to *force* myself on you—in that department at least."

"Ah," said she, "I thought you would be open to reason."

"But I make conditions," he said. "My friend's brain is in too critical a way to be agitated by scenes of this sort—contentious—besides, I have other work. There is a doctor called Cameron, an old pupil of

nine, steady as a rock, learned as a pundit, and religious as a saint. It is the luckiest chance *for us*. He arrived only a couple of days ago, and came to call on me. He has just come back from a voyage as a ship's surgeon, and is getting into practice. Such a head, such a purpose as that man has."

"I have never even heard of his name," said Mrs. Lepell. "What of him?"

"Well, have *him*? I name him. I have the same confidence as I would have in myself" — Mrs. Lepell smiled contemptuously — "and on this condition I shall promise not to obtrude my medical services."

"With all my heart, then," she said, "send your Doctor Cameron here."

"We need not go far," he said; "he is below in the carriage."

Mrs. Lepell coloured. "This is very smart and sharp. I hardly understand——"

But the Doctor had gone, and in a moment returned with his friend.

The new Doctor was very tall, stooped and angular, with a high forehead and sad eyes, a pale, sharply-cut face, and a serious, composed air. He deserved the character given of him: of steady attention and hard study. But his manner would be objected to by critics. With patients in danger, manner is of small consequence, but for the crowd not very seriously affected, who come and wait in the parlour, and require "attention" and soothing, it is a great deal. These he did not encourage. This tall, angular, stooped young Doctor was besides of an ascetic turn: was said to devote his few spare moments of nights to "addressing" private meetings on religious subjects, had prayers at his house, and was known besides to hold the gloomiest Calvinist convictions. He entered with softness, but bluntly, and stood there waiting till he should be addressed.

"Here, Cameron," said his friend; "let me introduce you to Mrs. Lepell." The other bowed stiffly. His eyes measured her from her head to the very ground. Then,

turning away with a sort of grim repulsion, he said, sharply, "Where can I see the patient?" Helen said, eagerly, "I shall show you the way; papa will be so glad."

Mrs. Lepell and Doctor Pinkerton were then left together.

"I congratulate you," he said, ironically. "I have brought a treasure into the house. That man's touch is like a miracle. He can work cures. He has ten times my skill and energy. He has much less to do, and when he takes up a business that he likes, throws his whole soul, heart, mind, and body into it. He triumphs over disease by sheer violence of will. It was lucky I thought of him."

"You are too modest," said she, smiling. "The best cure for my husband will be perfect rest from *intrusions*—perfect rest from the interference of strangers, or from unpleasant discussions."

"Yet another such a scene as last night would go nigh to killing him. I say nothing about the party, but that expedition to the prison, or whatever they call it—if *he* knew *that*——"

Mrs. Lepell coloured. "What can *you* know of my movements; what *right* have you——"

"Accident, pure accident, I assure you. For instance, I heard of this party, and I knew that it would be a good opportunity to see my friend. Excuse the candour of my telling you so. Then at the club I met a gentleman who told me of Mr. Severne's painful business, and somehow, an instinct told me *his* championship on this day altogether. You understand. In *fact* I *have a turn for finding out my neighbours' doings*. So you will be cautious, my dear Madam. I put you on your guard; and now that I have my friend on the ground, I warn you about *him*. He is a rough and tough creature, must have his way, and can make a noise."

Again Mrs. Lepell's colour rose. "I suppose he will know how to behave as any proper doctor will do. If not I shall speedily——"

Doctor Pinkerton shook his head. "Hardly, I think.

That is one of his peculiarities—adhesiveness.—No. Well, Miss Helen?”

The young girl came in eagerly. “Papa is so pleased with the new Doctor, and he seems *so* clever, and he is so *good* too; and they have begun already to talk seriously, which papa likes.”

“There, I told you,” said the Doctor. “I couldn’t do anything of that sort. Now it is time for me to go. Good-bye. I wind up to-day—good-bye.”

Mrs. Lepell was left on her sofa in a strange reverie; many times did her foot press the ground impatiently. She tossed her head now and again, and compressed her lips. It would have been easy to translate all this into spoken language. What right had these men to address *her* in this tone? Would any *other* lady in Brooke Street be so addressed? It was intolerable.

But then there was the sort of fair excuse. The sick man who was not to be agitated—and there was a solace which comes very gratefully to us, even in the midst of trials and annoyances like this. There was a balm beyond; and she thought of the man she had saved last night—the generous man in whom she had so sincere an interest, and who was now well on his road to Marseilles. She thought of her letter, and went over to finish it.

As she was signing her name she heard a step and looked up.

The new Doctor was entering, and went over straight to the desk where she was writing.

“Would you allow me?” he said, “a prescription. I make no excuse for disturbing you. You can finish that later.”

“Oh, certainly,” she said, with a rather “hurt” manner. “There is no choice in the matter. That, of course, has the preference.”

He looked at her with stern astonishment.

“I should say so—as compared with a trivial letter that can wait any time.”

She was so astonished she could hardly answer. “Oh!

I *see*," she said with meaning, "you are a friend of Dr. Pinkerton's."

He looked up abstractedly from his writing, but he only looked at her as he was calculating his "scruples" and "grains." He had lain down on the table a little, stout, purple-bound volume, with a flap and black ribbon. She took it up, not knowing, perhaps, how it came there. He suddenly jumped up.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Lepell, but really I cannot. There is private writing in that."

"I had no intention, I assure you," she said, with perfect good humour. "It seemed to me a strange book—so stout and fat—overgrown."

"Hush," he said seriously. "You will excuse me, but *that* is a subject on which there can be no levity. It is the sacred Word, which by common consent——"

"I did not know it, I assure you. I thought it was a pocket-book."

"A pocket-book!" he said. "Surely that ONE BOOK of the world—it has a known conformation of its own that cannot be mistaken."

"Notwithstanding that you please to doubt what I say, I *did* take it for a pocket-book. I could show you upstairs an old pocket-book of my poor mother's that you could hardly distinguish from it."

He said nothing, but finished his prescription.

"I can ring, I suppose, to have this sent?"

While they waited he said suddenly, "If I might ask the question, do you read much of that book?"

"Why do you ask?" she said. "You are really approaching Doctor Pinkerton more and more every moment."

"Why do I ask?" he repeated, gravely. "Do you really and seriously wish for an answer? Is it such an unnatural one to put to a Christian lady? Then I shall tell you sincerely why I do ask. Those that live for the world, and are given up to its follies, are not in the habit of doing so. If they attempt it the thistles choke any flowers that may come up. I speak freely, as I am accustomed to speak."

"So it seems," she said, rather amused.

"So it seems," he repeated. "It seems free, no doubt; *that* is what you mean. Well, I have lately come over with two hundred men and women under my charge. There was little to do for their bodies; there were only a few sick; but for their souls God gave me the grace to do a great deal. This may have been free, Madam, but it is a freedom you will find in this—what you call a pocket-book."

She seemed awed by his earnestness.

"Oh that is, of course, a very good work indeed."

"A very good work indeed. What praise! You don't think so. I hate that conventional approval of fine people," he added vehemently, "patronising sacred things as it were."

"Sir!" she said, turning round to him.

"Madam," he said, "we are both *His* servants. Where *He* is concerned I cannot mince matters; He before all men and women. I am sorry to offend you, but—Here, will you have this taken to the chemist's?"

Patty had appeared, and went out with alacrity.

The lady of the house was not at all offended with this freedom. It had a sort of piquancy for her, for she saw that "the man was sincere."

"You don't offend me," she said; "I am so accustomed to strange speeches, that it is very hard to do *that*."

Presently reappeared Patty.

"There's a gentleman below, Ma'am, Lord John Raby."

"I can't see him," said Mrs. Lepell, decidedly. "I am not at home."

The Doctor rose. "So you know that man?" he said, sternly. "It astonishes me! In charity, I trust that you cannot know his real nature and character. I hope not. I am sure not."

"Hope not, and am sure not," she said, amused. "That means you *are* sure. And that you do hope. Why, you see Lord John everywhere."

"Ah, Madam," he said, sadly, "this is the true talk

of the world. What *is* it you see everywhere, if *that* be an excuse?—vice, folly, wickedness! *You* should not speak so lightly. Forgive me again. You at the head of a house, a wife, a guardian. If you only heard the sad story I heard from a poor creature who made the voyage out with me, of that man's wicked and devilish work——”

There was a voice on the stair. “Pooh, fiddlededee, my good child, none of that game!”

“This is shocking,” said Mrs. Lepell, agitated. “I daren't see him *after that*. How dare he?”

She stole into the back room, behind the *portière*, and opening the door softly, escaped.

Lord John came bursting in, looking round curiously. “Soho! where is she?” Then he heard the rustle, and darted out on the landing, but she was gone. “Come down, I say,” he called out. “What work and affectation—and deuced bad of its kind. Come down, unless you want me to come up—or——”

A hand was laid on his arm, a cold face was looking into his.

“Nice work,” repeated Lord John. “Such tricks. Well, friend, what do *you* want? How did *you* get in? None of this d—d juggling.”

“If you wish to know sincerely, I can tell you,” the other answered calmly. “There is no need to use that profane language. I am here on business.”

“Oh, I see. Physician for the soul. Fit him out light, right, and tight for the long road. Fill *his* flask and wallet, and then—fill your *own*. Eh! my friend?”

“Hush, hush!” said the other. “I do not want to hear you speak in this way. Even in a worldly view it has passed out. We must all go *that* road, recollect—and some of us—those who have spent most of their life—very soon, perhaps, and *then*——”

“G—d d—n your soul,” said Lord John, turning on him in a fury. “What d'ye mean with your snivelling and canting at *me*. Drop it, I tell you, and preach to your own conventicles. So you must come to preach here, must you? Where's your chapel? Ha! ha! Un-

common good. So that's the line she's set up *now*. Oh, I see now. *She* sent for you. Ha! ha!"

"Nothing of the kind. For shame! I am a physician, with very poor skill, which I am not ashamed to try and direct, by aid from One who will help us all if we ask—and I do say, Sir, without wishing to offend you, to hear you speak in this way, is shocking. The lady of the house does not wish to see you. She may have her reasons. She has her duties."

"Oh, listen to him," said Lord John, getting into good humour again. (He told the whole story that very night with some dramatic effect.) "So she's told you *that*. Duties, indeed. Attending her husband, I suppose. I declare she beats anything. You pious ones can swallow anything."

The other coloured.

"I am as worldly in matters of sense as most people," he replied. "I know what Mrs. Lepell is, perfectly—perhaps better than you, though I have known her only a few hours. The common fallacy is this, that it is only the silly and foolish who can honour the Almighty Lord who made us. I know that she is light and foolish, as well, perhaps, as you."

"But you'll convert her, my boy, eh? Bring her in through the little gate? Here, Patty! Patty! How long am I to be kept here? Go up again at once, and tell your mistress that I am here and waiting—Lord John Raby. Go at once, or there'll be a row."

The girl went up again. The Doctor then said to him gravely—

"You, too—in a high station—you should show—forgive me, I say, for speaking freely—a better example. What an opening! What an opportunity! Then rank becomes a blessing indeed. It is here that people like us feel our inferiority. *We* have *no* claim. But *you*, my Lord—"

"Pi—sh," said his Lordship, lightly: "what are you at? Well, Betty, Kitty, or whatever it is, what does she say?"

"She's very sorry—but she can't come down indeed."

Lord John looked at her for a moment, then burst out, quite loud on the landing—

“Very well, very well! Give her my compliments, and tell her she may be sorry for this yet—all in good time. You going to stay, my reverend friend? Good-bye to you, and good luck to the good work.”

“Good-bye to you,” said the other, “and good luck to the work too. I say it without the least irreverence, but in all sincerity, I hope Heaven will give you grace to think sometimes—if only for a moment!”

“Swaddler!” said Lord John, as he went down stairs. He went home in a rage. “Such airs! Let her take care I don’t destroy her and her airs in ten seconds. Thinks she’s independent—does she?” Still, notwithstanding this hostile tone, he was sadly discontented and put out; and going off to see his “widow,” did not at all advance his suit with that lady. This sent him away again in a worse humour. He had been hitherto accustomed to have his likings consulted in everything. When he came home he found a letter waiting him. He knew the writing. “Egad, she’s struck, Ma’am”—(he always addressed an imaginary lady)—“and not a minute too soon.” He read it. It ran :—

“DEAR LORD JOHN,—After what passed last night, I must really ask that you will not come to our house. I don’t set up to have *feelings*, as you would say: *I* have no business to have such an article of luxury. As you know you have indulged yourself in saying things to me, which you would not say, perhaps, to Lady Dumaurier, or any like her, which of course I had to put up with, *having only a dying husband—bed-ridden*, as I might say—to protect me. But it was very different last night. To assail me in that bitter way, *before my step-daughter!* What respect do you suppose *she* can have for me? What can she report to her father as to the way her mamma is treated by gentlemen when she goes out to parties? Before all those strange people

too ! It was unkind, ungenerous. I should have said nothing in other circumstances ; but our family is concerned now. Therefore you must not come to our house ; nor can I see you again until some proper reparation is made. I am firm on this. What that reparation is to be I leave to your own sense of manly honour.

“J. L.”

There were expressions of disgust as this letter was read. “Reparation to be ! A five-pound note most likely ! ’Pon my word, this is coming to something. Then if she waits for *that*, she may wait. I’ll make you smart, my young woman ;” and he went off to his club, and there had his revenge with the old lord, whom he found in high spirits.

“I say,” mumbled the latter, “our friend here isn’t quite in the key to-day. But, don’t you know, I came on a very fine young woman there last night—one of his young people—and, egad,” almost crowed the old Lord, “she wouldn’t go down to supper with him. Threw him overboard again. Egad, I had my chance.”

Lord John looked at him vindictively, but with complacency.

“Listen to him ; why he’s getting younger every hour ! A blooming creature, aint he ? Do you know who she is ? May be a milliner’s girl from Liverpool, who thought she took in a rich man that *isn’t* rich. Consult me, my friend—I know a thing or two—next time. That’s a grand business for our young and noble friend there, aint it ?”

In this way he, “chaffed” the old Lord with a spiteful humour, went away to other places, dined out, growled over the dinner, and was sulky and bearish to the lady he took in. The young girl, Helen, had been listening over the stairs with a fluttering heart. She heard the Lord’s angry challenges, and shrank back. When he was finally out of the house she stole down and found the Doctor.

“Is that man,” he said suddenly, “a friend of the house ? Does he come here often ? Surely not.”

She hung down her head.

"He does, indeed," she answered; "comes here too often. He forced us to go to that place that night. He disturbs papa, who abhors him."

"And your mamma," he said; "does she?"

Helen looked down.

"I am afraid—that is, she is only a woman, and not strong enough."

"But this *should* not be," he said, "and we must take care it *shall* not. Such a wretch as that should not be admitted to any virtuous house. He poisons the air! It cries to Heaven, and is an outrage to the Being who looks down on us! It is a scandal, and shall be stopped. And your mother: is she fond of such company? Does she go to parties, and like these vanities that are going on about us? And if I may ask the question—for I look on myself, Miss Helen, as called on to stand by your poor suffering father—*Is she fond of you?* Is she kind—good? I have a reason for asking. I am your father's friend—a good man and pious, and I would wish to be yours. I can be of use, I know, beyond my poor medical skill. Speak."

She hung down her head. Her slight chest rose and fell. On such encouragement her sympathies were touched.

"Oh, Sir," she said in a burst, "we are very unhappy and very helpless here. There is no one we can look to. She—mamma—does not love papa; at least, she is not kind to him—and oh, Sir, *do not let him die*, as *I fear he will, if this goes on*. Oh, I am miserable, Sir."

She sank down in a flood of tears, as if her heart was breaking. It was indeed the dreadful feeling of desertion and utter helplessness that overcame her.

The Doctor was overpowered and softened.

"My poor child, you are not so abandoned as you think. There is One who watches over the helpless and sends them friends. I feel an inspiration that I am sent to you. It is like a mission. I am strong, not from myself, but from above. And I have met des-

perate men, ay, and women, too, and baffled them before now ! ”

And he looked up with devout eyes to heaven, and remained a moment in silence.

“ You must tell me,” he said, in a low voice, “ something—all you know. Where did she come from? How did she come into your family? ”

Then the young girl broke out.

“ Oh, those happy, happy days ! It was too much. Our dear father—he was another father then—until we went abroad to that dreadful place, and there—there—he met her.” On this beginning she went on and told the whole of their little history, unconsciously revealing to the Doctor little traits and touches of Jenny during that critical time before she became Mrs. Lepell.

When she had done, and he had listened with the most absorbed interest,

“ I see the whole,” he said. “ I might have been present. Alas ! it is a very old story. No matter, my dear child ; in me you have a friend and protector, and now that I know all and see the whole, *you may depend on me*. From this hour we shall make *him* well ; and in other matters, with the assistance of the Great Helper, bring about a change.”

“ Hush ! ” said the young girl, alarmed, and fled into the next room.

* * * * *

Mrs. Lepell came down to the drawing-room, blooming, in a brilliant bonnet for walking. The Scotch Doctor was walking up and down.

“ How patient is Heaven,” he said, “ when it endures such men.”

“ Yes,” said she, “ he is rather free and wild, but I was determined to have my way. If he had stayed here until midnight I should not have come down. You see I have spirit, Dr. Cameron. Do you admire it? ”

She was really in a glow of excitement, for she had

been thinking up stairs how everything was going so well with her *now*. The turn had come.

He did not answer, but turned away abruptly.

"Well," she said, "you think it was *not* spirit?"

"It would be greater spirit yet," he said, bluntly, "not to know such a man at all. I have seen soldiers and rude depraved men of all sorts, but none with such a cold, hopeless, satanic soul as his."

"Whose? Lord John's? Good gracious! how you frighten one. Do you know, I am afraid you are a little simple and inexperienced, Doctor Cameron!"

He coloured at this and bit his lip.

"I have come in contact with many men—more than perhaps your man of the world—and I tell you plainly, Mrs. Lepell, that man should not be here, and should never have entered; it is Sin—Satan—Death. Indeed I am surprised—with a young, soft, innocent child up stairs. Why his presence is contagion."

"You talk most strangely," she said, amused. "Such odd ideas! If Lord John heard you! Well, you have seen what I have done. He is not to come here again."

"A fiction," he said, warmly; "a foolish, childish pretence. As if I can be taken in by that! I tell you you are accountable for that child; you *are*. If you do your duty you will write to that man. Tell him he must never cross your threshold. If he attempts it again, tell him you will call in your friends—police—and have him dragged from the door."

She burst into genuine laughter.

"This is really droll," she said. "Where on earth do you get all these ideas? *I am* going to write to him."

"Ah, I know the strain," he said; "I know what all this means; this is the world—pretended anger, pretended rebukes, and the like. I tell you, you are sinning; and I tell you, too, in the name of One who sees and knows all our hearts, you are doing what is sinful in exposing a guiltless young soul with the bloom of innocence on it to such contagion. Listen to me. Do, for her sake."

"I tell you," Dr. Cameron, "I am writing now."

"Will you show me the letter?"

She gave him a cold stare from his feet up to his head.

"You can hardly be serious. Is it not time for you to go up and see my husband—your patient?"

He walked impatiently out of the room.

She looked after him very thoughtfully, with her cheek resting on her hand, then smiled, and wrote the letter to Lord John which has just been given.





CHAPTER II.

FIRST SKIRMISH.



R. CAMERON had gone away for that night. Mrs. Lepell was left to soft and charming dreams and pictures; though, indeed, it did not seem clear how those dreams and pictures were ever to take perfect shape; still, out of the capricious future, with such beginnings, Heaven knows what might be evolved. On the next day he came again, and, greeting her with grim austerity, passed up. The three—he, Helen and her father—sat together up stairs. Was it in council? Another time she might have been suspicious of this league; but now she was too good-humoured and full of hope to be disturbed at anything. She even went up—their talking stopped when they saw her.

“Go on,” she said, smiling, “don’t mind me. What are you talking of?”

The Doctor rose gravely, and said—

“Mr. Lepell *was* talking of you.”

“Ah!” she said, going over to him, “that is kind! How do you feel to-day, dear? How does the new physician——”

The sick man looked at her distrustfully, and said—

“Well, very well. I look on it as a blessing that he has come under this roof. He will cure me in more ways than one.”

Mrs. Lepell looked at the Doctor with an amused air.

“Oh, I see,” she said; “quite right; most necessary for us all.”

"It is," said the Doctor, gravely.

"The one thing necessary," repeated Mrs. Lepell.

"I cannot bear *that*," he said; "you must spare *that* at least. The greatest prince or duchess in the land—even from them it must not be."

At this moment entered Patty, with a letter—

"From Lord John Raby, Ma'am," she said, "and no answer."

The Doctor's face flushed up. He motioned gravely to Mr. Lepell, who raised himself excitedly on his pillow.

"We were speaking of that as you came in. Weak as I am, degraded as I have been, I have resolved on one thing at least. Go away, my pet, a moment. We must take care of the innocent. *That* is a sacred charge, and I cannot have my daughter contaminated by the presence of wicked men like that. It must not be. It *shall* not be, while I live."

"I have no right to interfere here," said the Doctor; "but, I understood, from what Mrs. Lepell said yesterday, that all this was over. Now it seems, on the contrary, that it is beginning afresh. I did indeed expect better things; but——"

She, meanwhile, was reading her letter, a little discomposed, possibly, by the contents. They were very short:—

"You are quite under a mistake, my dear Madam, altogether. You have mistaken *me* too. All my life I have accustomed myself to make terms, and have generally succeeded in that way pretty well. So, if you wait until I apologise, as you call it, it will be a very long business. What if I took it into my head to make others apologise? You remember the story I told you—as a warning, I confess—of the young married lady who tried the same trick with me! At any rate, I can be indulgent—all the better for you—and leave things as they are.

"J. R."

"Do you hear me?" went on Mr. Lepell, with tremb-

ling voice. "Or is this affected indifference? But it will not do now. I am accountable to God for the charge of the innocent. I have been too culpable hitherto—too weak and neglectful to have allowed a vile wretch like that to enter under my roof. His very presence is contagion."

Mrs. Lepell gave a half smile, half start, and looked over at the Doctor. She remembered these words.

"'Presence is contagion!' Oh, I see!" she said; "I know all this now. What has this gentleman been pleased to say I have done now?"

"Are you serious in your question?" he said.

"Perfectly."

"Well, then, you agreed with all I said yesterday. I told you of the infamous character of the man, which common charity makes me believe was all new to you. Any other person—forgive my freedom—in your position would have shrunk with horror from the very sight of him. Yet you *wrote* to him. You cannot deny it; I know it; and you now receive an answer back from him. I do not like this. I say it is wrong where there is a young girl, one of God's tender blossoms, stamped with the freshness of *His* image; and I tell her father here what his duty is, and what he *must* do."

"And what he *will* do," said the excited man sitting up. "I have been too culpable and remiss. I have neglected what my religion and my duty called me to do too long. At that accounting day, to which I may be hurrying, I shall be made to answer heavily for all my sins; but for this one, at least, I shall try and be free. That man shall never come here again, though you write and write again."

She bowed her head meekly under this reproof.

"You all do me wrong," she said, gently. "You know well where we met him, and who introduced him. I am not accountable for *that*. If he is so bad and designing as you say, the more difficult for a poor weak woman."

The sick man, still excited, repeated, half contemptuously, "Poor weak woman!"

She only bowed her head in reply, this time crossing her hands on her breast: "It is hard for such to do right, even if they wish to, dealing with men of that kind. The match is not equal. Besides, this gentleman—this good and holy gentleman—who is so full of that charity for his fellow-creatures which that Gospel he is always quoting, and that Heavenly Master he serves, inculcates—may be a little rash in assuming too much against me. I shall make no reply or justification, and only thank you for sending out your daughter so as not to witness her step-mother's arraignment before this acquaintance of yesterday."

She bowed her head again, and left the room softly. Neither of them could reply. She got down to the drawing-room and seated herself in a warm chair before the fire. Her face contracted with vexation. Was she thinking that she was alone in that house, with no friend, and strangers brought in to be her enemies? Nevertheless, she had not lost her dignity, and, on the whole, had the better of them there. She had her feet on the fender, and her dress—shall we say it?—a little raised, when she heard a heavy step behind, and hastily, and in sad confusion, returned to the normal and more becoming attitude;—she was indeed a prude, though sometime married now. The Doctor had entered.

He said: "There was some justice in the severe reply you made just now. Heaven knows I know my own defects: and perhaps there may have been, as you say, some want of charity in what I have been saying and doing. Most likely so. If I have done wrong, I beg your pardon. Of course, I cannot expect you, as you say, to justify yourself; I have no title to do so. I know my position as well as anyone; I *am* not so unworldly as you suppose; nor, give me leave to tell you, does a simplicity and folly in worldly things always attend the services of a lord. God forbid! But, as I say, if I have been hasty, I am sorry; and I tell you from my heart, I should be *glad* to know that I have been wrong."

Mrs. Lepell was looking away; it was rather dusk, but

she was smiling. "Come," she said, "I am glad to hear you speak in that way. I am the poor Pariah of this house, as you will have seen already. Every hand is against me, and that *rather generous* speech comforts me. Come, in return for it you shall know what has happened. I knew your better judgment would do me justice. But though I know what is due to my dignity, to *you* I will now show how the thing really is. Look here. Here is a scrap of my letter to Lord John, indeed a good bit of it. He came here as you saw, and I told him he is *not* to come again. Can I do more?"

He read with some surprise.

"Now read *his* answer"—and she put *that* into his hand. "You see he will never come again. Not that I find myself in any way bound—I only want to *show* you that I was not writing to *invite* him here. What do you say now?"

"That I was"—he paused—"a little hasty; wrong perhaps."

"What!" she said, standing up, "is *that* all that your righteousness teaches you? only such a grudging *amende* as *that*! A poor sinner like me could quote you Scripture for something more, only that you will say it is profane. Come!"

There was a curious banter in her tone which disturbed him.

"Well, I was wrong, I suppose—I ask pardon."

"Well, *my* faith teaches me to forgive; so you are forgiven. But there is a *little* more yet. I must be set right before the world. Does not candour as well as righteousness ordain that you should come up and own before my husband and step-daughter that you have been wrong?"

He coloured.

"You exact a great deal."

"Not more, surely, than the great Christian law of charity—'Every idle word,' you know—and to tell you the truth, Doctor Cameron, I confess I want to secure myself for the future, by *weakening your prestige a little*—showing that your judgment is not *quite* infallible."

He looked at her a little confused, then followed her slowly. She stopped half-way up.

"There," she said, "I merely wished to frighten you. I won't ask this *amende*."

But he became cold again.

"You are perfectly right," he said; "it is only your duty by the great commandment; neither you nor I can compound such things. I have my duty to One who is above. Go, you shall have justice, and everything fitting; and as for the future," he said, "I shall only be more cautious. But I see—excuse me saying so—you are more clever than I thought."

They went up into the room, and there he gravely explained what he was directed to do.

"It seems we have mistaken Mrs. Lepell, and misjudged her—I have seen the letters—and I am sorry for it."

Mr. Lepell took his hand. "I admire you the more for this."

As he went out Mrs. Lepell whispered to him with meaning, "*We* were mistaken! Ingenuous community. Was it not *I*?"

Later during that day Patty came up again with a message, to know if Doctor Pinkerton was there. Mrs. Lepell was sitting before her fire reading, with her feet upon the fender, and her dress in her favourite disposition.

"Of course not; surely you could tell them *that* without coming to me?"

"Only they thought you might know where he was."

"We know nothing about him at all, in this house," said Mrs. Lepell.

But Patty stole up stairs, knocked at her master's door, asked to see Mr. Cameron, who came out to her.

"Doctor Pinkerton is gone down to the country on a special business. He left me to do any sudden duty."

"Who sent you?"

"A Mrs. Palmer, Sir. Her daughter is very ill indeed."

"I shall go, then," he said, "if they wish. You can ask them. There is Doctor Hunt, whom I know he has great confidence in. Tell them of him, too, if they should prefer him." In a few moments he went away, and drove straight to the Palmers'.



CHAPTER III.

THE DOCTOR'S VISIT.

THE events of "that night," and the strange shapeless rumours that succeeded, had been too much for the young girl; worse than all had been a letter written by Severne to her mother. Cold, cutting, and bitter, written under the influence of a neglect and contempt that was now discovered to be powerless; and written in the intoxication of one who was lifted from the depths of misery to triumph and victory. It ran—

"I am going away to Italy in an hour—thank God, not in the position you saw me in last. I cannot tell you what you and your daughter have made me suffer these few weeks back. Worse than this persecution I have endured, was the spectacle of your undisguised change with my fortunes. Thank God for it, though; for it has saved me from a life of greater misery. I saw you last night. I was standing near your door as you set off to go to *your* party—you in your splendid dresses—going, perhaps, to seek some one more suitable than the man of broken fortunes that you little thought was looking at you. But there was more in store for me—a bitterness, a cold, cruel, heartless stroke, that I never dreamed you could bring yourself to. When you were told of the *degradation* that had come on me, I hear you and your daughter smiled. Your diversion was not to be interrupted for such a trifle as that. But there were others—Christian angels—in that room—worldlings as

you would call them ; women that the fine ladies were edging away from. *She* came to me in my troubles, and saved me. You shall know her name, and blush ; for I have heard how *you have spoken of her*. You and yours might learn from that angel. Heaven send I may live to recompense her. The world at her feet would not be too much for such disinterested goodness.

“And Heaven has put it in my power to do something. You will have heard *that* also—the death of my cousin, and of my improved hopes. There is other news, too, but all in good time. Ah ! you should have thought, when you were treating me in the way you did, that worldliness is often worldly folly, and that mere honour, and loyalty to engagements, and kindness, is the best policy. You might even have waited events, like the worldly mothers do. However, that is all past and gone. Thank Heaven, my eyes are opened, and I wake to a new round—a new world of affections, and even enjoyments. Perhaps I speak too warmly. If I do, recollect all I have passed through these months back, and the agonies *you and yours have added to*. There, I am going away for months, and I can only tell you I shall *never* ask you to retract the cruel dismissal I received.

“H. SEVERNE.”

This strange and frantic letter was taken in at the door by the honest landlady about eight o'clock in the morning. The young girl in whom she felt such an interest had never slept during the night. Nay, the good woman had heard some sobs, which disturbed her good heart sadly. When the note was given in, and the bearer (it being the custom of the house to interrogate closely every bearer of every letter as to who sent him, &c.) had told that it came from Mr. Severne, it seemed like a doctor's prescription, and she crept up stairs with a delighted mystery. It was medicine from the Doctor—good news—balsam. She put it into the hands of the fevered young girl. What a curative *that* was may be conceived—devoured passionately, and with burning eyes ! It seemed like a death-blow, and as if some cruel

pitiless fate had taken special care to arrange a perverse train of misfortune, with a special and perverse view to her misery. Oh, that wretched, miserable party! A few hours would have made all the difference, and saved all. When her mother came in she broke forth into a torrent of sad reproaches. "I listened to *you*, mother. You made me do this: and I have lost him now for ever—for ever. Nothing can restore him. Now he will be rich, and he will never come back; and—and I deserve it all. And you see whose work it is. From the day I saw that woman's face at Digby, I knew she was my enemy. *She* has done it all. We should have conciliated her; I said so. Now it is too late. She has the power of a demon. Oh, what is to become of me? and I deserve it all."

All this time the mother was calmly reading the letter from beginning to end, not at all heeding these childish and foolish utterances. "What a woman!" she said, half aloud. "How cunning of her! She managed it wonderfully. She is *really* clever. Hush, now, my dear. You will be ill again if you don't take care."

"I do not care," she answered passionately. "I wish I was. I should like, most of all, to be out of this world; but that is too great a good fortune for me! But I deserve it all—to be so false and *wicked*, and to have acted so cruelly to *him*!"

Her mother looked at her with wonder. She never thought that her daughter was this deeply passionate girl, who had hitherto—such was her pride—concealed her heart even from her mother. That mother was struck with the unnatural light in the brilliant eyes.

"Why, you are ill, my child! Have you slept? What have you been doing? Ah! I see—such folly!" She took her hand. "Goodness, what folly! Why, you will be in a fever if you go on. Now don't think of this business any more. I promise you we will do something yet. This woman has taken me by surprise. But I can be as cunning as she is any day. We shall have to wait. But I tell you, you haven't lost him yet. She shall find her match, I promise you, clever as she is."

Indeed, this idea, more than the condition of her child, seemed to have taken possession of the mother, and made her thoughtful. Her eyes wandered restlessly over the room, as though she were planning something.

But this was no comfort to the young girl. Whatever was to come, there was at best a miserable delay between—whole months, and an interminable distance to Italy. What a remedy for a young soul—in *that* condition! A delay of months, and the fatal idea of travel, sets everything at the distance of a hopeless eternity.

Later in the day she grew worse, and then Mrs. Palmer sent for Dr. Pinkerton—one of those “friendly” doctors who do not make out perfect bills of costs. There were a few patients from whom he would “take nothing;” and a “pretty girl,” or “a fine girl” who was not “stuck up,” and had something “in her,” he found a pleasure in attending, on such agreeable terms. Miss Palmer he had seen and admired, and her mother—business-like always—had at once gazetted him Family Physician.

He, as it has been seen, could not come. The Scotch doctor, Cameron, arrived in his place. He was shown to the room, and went through his duties gravely. They had confidence in him: he was so composed, and seemed so full of power. He, too, was struck, like his predecessor, with an interest in this brilliant young creature. When he came the mother had gone out. The faithful landlady stood by and listened eagerly.

“There is some worry on your mind, Miss Palmer,” he said kindly, for *him*. “That I can do nothing with. But I do beg of you to put it by for the present. I know how difficult it is, and how easy to preach on such matters; but I do—seriously—ask you to try to do this. Make the attempt at least, or my poor labours will be quite without profit.”

“Indeed, Sir, you are right,” said the faithful landlady. “The poor young lady is sadly tried; and I know she will try to do what you say. She says she does not want to get well, and would rather die.”

The Doctor turned to where the bright eyes were flashing.

"This is the old story," he said, emphatically. "Some of that sickly folly of which there is too much in this world. You would wish to die because of some neglect—on account of a mere child's dream. When shall we have done with this wretched work? My dear child, for your own sake, put these things far from you; strive to keep the precious life—the days of priceless youth and innocence that have been given to you to prepare for a happy and future world."

At this rebuke the young girl hid her face.

"I speak harshly, I know," he went on, "and not to the usual soft tune which is customary with men of my profession. If I can help you in any way I will. The advice I give you is the best. There is nothing in this world worth dying for—no man, certainly."

"Ah, Sir," struck in the faithful landlady, with deep sympathy, "if you only knew! There have been some wicked folk at work, I know, else all would have gone on so happily and pleasantly. There is a cruel woman, Sir——"

"Hush!" said the sick girl, raising herself hastily. "You mustn't speak of that. I shall be better," she said to the Doctor. "I know I shall—*soon*. Thank you, though, for your kind advice, and I shall try and follow it, if I can. But it is very hard."

He went down slowly. The faithful landlady poured out mysterious whisperings. "The poor heart," she said. "What is to become of her? Of all the dismal histories you ever heard, Sir, this is one. And all, I am convinced, would have gone straight, Sir, but for a designing woman—a Mrs. Lepell——"

"Who?" said the Doctor, stopping short with a start. "Mrs. Lepell, did you say?"

"She is at the bottom of it. The young man was coming here regularly, and never were two more attached, or would have made a nicer couple; but this lady had designs of her own, or it might be from mere mischief and devilry, of which God knows there is enough in this world——"

"Who is this young man?" said he, abruptly.

"Mr. Severne," said the landlady—"a noble young man that loves her, but got into distress, poor fellow, and then *her* mother grew cold on him, which is natural enough for mothers. But the other was a deep one, and saw further, Sir, or knew more, that somehow the turn was coming. And so he is now a rich man, and next heir to a title, they say, all of a sudden; and the poor sick child up stairs is left deserted, as he thinks she threw him off because he was poor, and he is not likely to come back to her now."

The Doctor listened with deep thought. "This may be all fanciful," he said. "You should be careful in saying these things. Why should Mrs. Lepell do such a thing? Even according to a worldly view what profit could she find——"

"Ah, Sir," said the other, eagerly. "You are too good and innocent to be up to the ways of these wicked women. We have all heard of Dr. Cameron and his goodness——"

"Hush, hush!" he said, emphatically. "Please don't."

"They tell me *she has a dying husband*: and from the day she met this young fellow in the country the mischief began. There are games and games, Sir; and hers is not so bad a one."

As she said the word, "a dying husband," he almost started. A sort of conviction came into his eyes—they dropped upon the ground. Suddenly she ran to the window. "Ah! here is Mrs. Palmer home again—just in time, Sir."

That lady came in "just in time," as was remarked. She made a feint of offering the usual remuneration, but, as she had anticipated, it was declined. "I am merely acting for Dr. Pinkerton," he said, "as a friend. You will speak to him." He was, indeed, thinking of other matters. He went away in deep thought: and, as he turned down the street, he said to himself half-aloud, "She could *hardly* be so wicked. Impossible—and yet, it seems too likely. But I shall watch—I shall watch."

He returned to Mr. Lepell's, and was met anxiously by Helen on the stair. "I am so glad you have come," she said, with wistful face. "Papa has sent down a dozen times to know have you come back."

"Why," he said, in surprise, "has anything happened? Does he want me?"

"No," she answered, "but he is restless, and he begins to miss you. I hope," she added, earnestly, "you will be as much with him as you can. Do promise me. He finds such comfort with you; you cheer him up so. Somehow I feel, Doctor Cameron," she went on, looking round with a half-mysterious air, "that you are to be our friend and our protector. Somehow we have no one to look to, and I feel quite helpless."

"My dear child," he said, taking her hand, "these are strange promptings; but it is foolish to disregard them. On the very day I entered this house something seemed to whisper to me also, that I was to have a mission here—that I was called to help and aid a good and virtuous family. And I heard this call; I prayed that I might have strength to carry out that duty, whatever shape it might take. But to-day I have heard a more mysterious warning still. Wonderfully does Providence order things! Yes, there is a task before me in this house—a duty, and I now solemnly accept it. I shall protect you and your father, but it will need all my watchfulness and care."

She was full of alarm and flutter, and yet she seemed to half-understand. "What does this mean?" she asked.

"We must watch—we must *both* watch," he said. "I shall tell you more later. I must go now to your father. Stay. I have just come from a sick girl—a charming, natural girl—who is suffering in mind and body. Here is another mysterious link—and here again I see that Almighty finger which directs all! You must know her—will you go and see her? She knows your father—and—hers is a very sad story. And as from this house came some of her trouble, so from this house should come some compensation."

The young girl was soft and tender and impressionable. Here was a little picture that roused her sympathy in a moment. "I shall go at once," she said, "nor lose a moment. Tell me where it is."

"Good and gentle Samaritan," he said, with grave approval. "*She* will tell you her little story, and you will then understand what I have said." She was gone to get her bonnet. Now was heard the voice of Mr. Lepell, calling a little querulously,

Dr. Cameron went up, and as he went he said to himself, softly and devoutly, "Yes, I *feel* that I am called to save and protect this family."





CHAPTER IV

A LITTLE DINNER.

T HIS company was indeed growing almost necessary to the invalid, who found a great comfort even in his presence. Long ago he had been fond of poring over abstruse old books of divinity, and those quainter and wilder speculative questions which are now more settled, and are too abstract to be of interest. Even now round his shelves were grey dotards in clothes of mouldy cut, full of all infirmities that binding is heir to. Moth-eaten eruptions, loose joints, weak sinews, worn ribs, and discoloured skin—a class of broken-down old men whom Mrs. Lepell, with all her regard for the “Short Way,” must have called “musty” or “fusty.” These, Bishop Catley—the works of Shortall, the sweet-tongued Dissenter, who was imprisoned by Charles the Second, and burnt in the hand—the strange “queries” of the ingenious Dobbs, of Whalley—the sermons of Dr. Gurney—these were the things that drew him now; and the placid face, now a little contracted with pain and sickness, but with a wildness in the eye, was bent over the discoloured pages busy with some dreamy, and certainly useless speculations. Many of these ran on the dismal doctrines of Calvin—the great problem of Salvation and Election, and cruel and pitiless Reprobation. It was about this time that this last fatal notion began to take hold of him, and over it he began to talk with a weary earnestness with his friend.

Such stern selection and exclusion was the doctrine of Doctor Cameron. He believed that he himself, by an Infinite mercy, had been called and chosen, just as there were others who had been cast out from the beginning. Yet with this sick man, so earnest and feverish in the pursuit, he was very tender, to help him far away from so chilling a theory, for he saw how it would take hold of his mind. But the other only worked his way yet deeper.

For the pair there was a fascination in the pursuit. But Dr. Cameron took care to turn the subject to profit, and he would speak gently, but firmly, to his new friend on the great Thing necessary; the awful future and the present certainty—"What is this wretched life, after all? We hold it but by a thread," &c. ;—and on one of these long nights Mr. Lepell opened his heart to him and told his whole story, to which the other listened with a deep interest. It was a dismal history indeed, the end whereof had not yet come. The same thought was in each mind, the hopelessness of the future.

Yet the Doctor took his friend's hand. "More and more do I think it, that I have been sent—sent specially into this house, to help and shelter you both—under Heaven."

Now was an opportunity, and tenderly and gently he proceeded to tell him what he knew and what he suspected—hinting, indeed, more than telling. The hour was near to twelve, and the sick man's eyes rolled and glittered with strange excitement as he heard these strange hints; about Severne and his change of fortune, and the possible game that Mrs. Lepell might have in view.

"Mind, this may be all speculation, and it is new to you. But still, it is right that you should know. It is no harm to be on our guard. *But you may leave all to me.*" Still it came like conviction to Mr. Lepell; and for him that was the weariest night he had yet spent.

Some days now passed over. We must beg indulgence for going minutely into all the stages of this business; and following as minutely the train of motives, feelings,

&c., which were the agents in what was going to take place within the walls of a prosy little drawing-room. With "John" bringing up coals or tea, or taking in cards below, may there not be a tremendous melodrama going on silently, and, as I firmly believe, the greater and more tremendous, because of the absence of blood and thunder, and the clashing of steel, or the smell of powder? Nay, to our humble mind, these rather impair the interest—imparting a theatrical air. No—true tragedy runs in the path of everyday prose, under a frock coat and waistcoat, with no scenery or foot-lights, in the relation of a Mr. and Mrs. Smith. These touch the true chord. In *a family*, every week occur things more interesting and exciting than all the murders and intrigues of the Porte St. Martin. Bad and wasteful sons, discontented daughters, the skirmishing, or savage war between husband and wife—the battle against duns and difficulty—the weary and really supernatural struggle, that finds means to keep up show and splendour and debt and difficulties—are not these topics absorbing as fairy tales? And the hand who would touch and marshal these, humbly following that unapproachable master, Balzac, should have as good an audience as the best story-teller of bigamy and murder.

Some more days went by. Mrs. Lepell was growing a little uneasy on the score of Lord John. Was her prescription going to fail? Alas! she thought she had known human nature better. After all, if she had turned him into a bitter enemy—*this* was scarcely knowing human nature. If she had lost a good friend, all for a little stupid punctilio—and *it was only his way*,—this was not a creditable knowledge of human nature. Thinking over these things she grew provoked and distressed, and had determined to write a clever little note in the morning, which should neither be an *amende* nor a challenge, but have a happy ambiguity. Who shall blame her, if with this hostile confederacy drawing round her, she try to retain allies of her own?

More than a fortnight had gone by.

Doctor Cameron would have been well justified in

holding it a special interposition of Providence, if it had happened to *him*, that a letter should have arrived that very afternoon from Lord John. Such an event actually took place. Patty—undisguisedly her lady's enemy—took care to say aloud whose "man" had brought it. The Doctor's eyes glanced over at the reader. The letter ran :

"MY DEAR MRS. L.,

"You behaved badly to an old friend, but I am not angry. I pass it over. I was a bold boy, too : but I go to mamma's knee and beg pardon. There ! What do you say, now ? I tell you what you will do, for you owe me something, indeed. Give us a little reconciliation dinner to-morrow at seven—a couple of chops—(nothing better, if they are raging, screaming hot), and a good bottle of wine ; and we shall make no noise, so as not to disturb the poor dear hubby up stairs. There, I shall drop in at seven—I know you have no engagement.

"Yours,

"J. R."

"You stand to your engagements, I see," said the Doctor, looking at her steadily.

"I do," she answered, coldly. "You may see this, if you please."

He shook his head, coldly. "No, I have no wish, no right, to inspect your correspondence. None in the world."

"Nor would I admit such a right. But for fear you should fall into such an unhappy misconception *as you did before*, and have to make so painful an *amende* to your conscience as you were obliged to do then——"

He coloured. "From what has happened since, I begin to think I was almost too hasty in that. Perhaps I might have reserved that *amende*, as you call it."

"Generous, indeed, of you !" said she, warmly. "Did I force you to make it ? Is this part of your heavenly religion ? However, I want no favour. I know the posi-

tion you hold in this house. There, I leave it ; read it or not, as you please ;" and she put it down on the table, and went out.

She left him in a strange perplexity. The effect of every meeting with her was to *un*-settle some previous resolution of his. "Artful and designing," he thought, "as she may be in other things, in *this* matter it is possible she might be right." After a short hesitation he took it up and read it.

When he saw her again, he said, bluntly, "I *did* read your letter, and——"

"I knew you would," she said, "a sense of justice—not, of course, curiosity—prompted you."

He did not notice this. "If I might ask, what answer will you send?"

"What *can* I send? He *will* come. My dinner is at seven."

"I suppose there is no door to the house—no servants, no police?"

"That is all absurd. I have done my part. You admitted that the other day. He has apologised. I have no wish to turn a dangerous man into an enemy. He is my friend ; at least, one of my *few* friends. Unless, indeed, *you* wish to command here as my lord's lieutenant——"

"Not in the least," he answered ; "but your lord,—that *is* the point. Have you no regard for his wishes?"

"Ah, the old discussion !" she said, wearily ; "tell him, if you like. But also tell him the whole truth—that I have not asked him, that I do not want him : that is, if the excitement into which your news will throw him will allow him to listen."

Both looked at each other. "Ah !" he said, "you have a check on me there."

"Come," she said, suddenly, "enemy of mine ! suspicious, envenomed enemy that nothing will appease ! You shall come, too. There ! I ask you to dine, and satisfy your own eyes—and ears."

For the moment he started, then shook his head. "I should be out of place in such company."

Next day, as it drew near to seven, Mrs. Lepell was sitting in her drawing-room, very becomingly arrayed in a toilette that seemed in tone for *tête-à-tête*. Her dress had a sort of cozy compactness and roundness, edged off with frills—a “cut down” Swiss peasant’s “body,” white, with a green edging and trimming. She was, of course, expecting her Lord John. Down below, the chops were already hissing and writhing in the pan, as Lord John was to remark later, “like some of the poor sinners down *there*.”

Suddenly entered—absolutely in a dress coat—Doctor Cameron. The young girl, Helen, was there also, dressed festively, but dispirited, as she always was now. Mrs. Lepell knew very well who had managed the attendance of *this* guest, who would have shrunk from such a party. But Doctor Cameron had thought it would be a good check. Mrs. Lepell was rather pleased. She might felicitate herself on her having managed everything so happily.

“I have accepted your invitation,” he said, “I can see, to your disappointment. But I cannot help that. It is for your own sake I come, not for any pleasure that I can find in the matter.”

“Charming!” she answered, laughing. “You said that with all the air of a refined Frenchman. Exactly what a Frenchman *would* say, you know.”

“The highest compliment you can pay me,” he said, a little sharply. “It is as much as to say I have no falseness, or flattery, or emptiness. Though, if I chose—and there was a time when I *could*—I could grimace and compliment with the best of them.”

She tried to hide her smiles with her fan. This stiff fellow grimacing and complimenting, did seem a comic notion.

He noticed it, and said a little testily, “Ah! you can’t conceive that. But it is true, I can tell you. Ball-rooms, and all that goes on in ball-rooms, and the whole round of dissipation—I knew all about that as well as any man—ay, and I could take it up now at this moment, if there was need.”

"Hush," she said; "surely not in your present state of—awakening, I think they call it? We have cast all these vanities behind us, haven't we?"

"Profane always," he said, angrily, "nor will you ever try and understand. What I mean is, and what I said before to you is, that the ways of religion do not suppose worldly foolishness nor imbecility; nor the paths of the gospel——"

"Hallo!" said a cheery voice, "what about the paths of the gospel? Who's got in here?" he added, shading his eyes. "What, our Little Bethel, I declare!"

"Doctor Cameron," said Mrs. Lepell, very gaily; "you met before, I think."

"Yes," said his Lordship, bluntly, "but you don't mean to say——. What are you about *now*? I don't——"

"Dr. Cameron has kindly consented to dine with us; at a very short notice, too."

"The shorter the better," growled his Lordship, eyeing the Doctor with hostility; "I never know what you are at. What! I have come to tell you I can't stay!—that I have a better engagement elsewhere. Ay, three of 'em for that matter. I like a lady that stands to her word."

"I am sorry you did not accept them, instead of coming to my stupid fireside."

"That's all very well," still growled Lord John, standing up over the fire. "Well, how is he—our friend up stairs—mending or not? I thought he should have the Doctor's eye on him night and day? I wonder our conscientious friend here could spare himself from such sacred duties."

In the Doctor Mrs. Lepell could not but notice a sudden change. He was not so grim and stiff; with the dress coat he had put on a greater softness of manner, and even a good humour. She, acute enough in her generation, fancied she detected the motive of this:

"His vanity is touched, and he wants to show—what, indeed, he is always preaching—that the religious mortal can be as knowing in a worldly sense as another."

She smiled as she thought of this solution. It did in-

deed seem very like it, for when Lord John, still growling, kept making "hits" at him, about his religious convictions, &c., the other good-humouredly turned them aside.

Dinner was announced, and Lord John gave his arm to Mrs. Lepell, and went down muttering and growling.

"What did you do this for? I believe out of infernal spite. Setting two Christians down to dine with a canting son of a swaddler like that. I declare I could cry to think of the nice little duet we have lost."

"Hush," she said, looking round fearfully, "Lord John. Can we all do as we like? Do you not know that in *this* house I am no more than one of my own servants? *That man* is a spy on me."

"Ah! go 'long!" said he, with a burst; "spies indeed!"

The sight of the little round table was very appetising indeed, and put him in better humour.

"This looks snug enough," he said. "It had been better if we had had the table even; no odd numbers for me. Will his Reverence give us grace?"

Doctor Cameron without hesitation said a short grace with much sincere devotion, Lord John grinning to his plate, and winking significantly to Mrs. Lepell all the time.

"Well done," he said, arranging his napkin; "I feel a better appetite after that: nothing like a blessing for the appetite. What's this—Cressy?—very good in its way. Do you know I've remarked a curious thing in my experience? Of all the dinners—where we are all miserable sinners that sit down—abandoned rascals, that never think of a grace at all—I never can eat so well as at the pious dinner; bankers, you know, and county members: I suppose that is the reason. I say, Fanny,—Mary—Goosey, just a little more of that. Unfashionable, I know, as I can see in my friend the Hotgospeller's eyes."

"You should know the fashion better than a poor Hotgospeller, as you call me. I suppose your experience was a jest, but I could understand it even if it were true.

I could imagine a man who had been grateful to his Maker for finding him so good a meal, eating with a better appetite than one who sat to his trough like a hog."

"Ha, ha ! very good indeed," said Lord John, enjoying his sherry. "Some of L.'s old bin, I know. But you're wrong in your natural history, friend. Hogs don't sit down to their troughs, at least, so far as I know. Our friend may have wider experience—ha ! ha !"

Mrs. Lepell giggled. "Come, Lord John," she said, "you must behave. Doctor Cameron is my friend and guest."

"Is he?" said the other, with a vindictive flash; "then he's not what you said to me going down stairs. Eh?"

Doctor Cameron coloured, and looked at her with eyes full of angry inquiry.

"I know perfectly what Mrs. Lepell thinks and says of me."

There was a purposeless malice about Lord John, which was as necessary to him as his food.

"Yes," said she, "it is open war. Doctor Cameron has come here professedly as my enemy. I don't want to be hypocritical and be pretending to keep terms."

"Charming all this little sparring is," said Lord John, looking from one to the other. "Then I tell you what, Bethel, my friend, if you think you're a match for her——"

"I am a match for no one," said the Doctor gravely. "I try to do my duty at all risks, and with what help I can find."

"From above, my friend, put that in. There's some saint says, 'Providence tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.' Eh?"

"Excuse me," said the other; "make as free as you please with me, but that I cannot listen to. No. There are bounds. I am sinful enough myself, Heaven knows. And I know Mrs. Lepell here can scarcely like the sacred Scripture to be——"

"Well, I think, Lord John, you might let *that* pass.

It is very *wrong* of you, Lord John. And Doctor Cameron is quite good and right."

"Oh there need be no compliments," said the latter. "I want none in such a case. That book is too sacred to be made free with."

"Don't I tell ye," said Lord John, "I am sorry? Shall I thump my breast for you? Fine passage though, 'shorn lamb.' Where does it occur?"

"I prefer not to talk on that subject."

"Because you don't know," said Lord John, bluntly. "Bet you a guinea it's not in the Scripture at all."

Both stared at Lord John. That nobleman burst out into a loud fit of laughter. "Sold! Floored!" he said. "It's not! not a word of it!"

"And do you know where it is?"

"'Sentimental Journey,' as I live. It is, on my soul. Oh here *is* a game!" And he had to lay down his knife and fork to laugh.

The tears came into Mrs. Lepell's eyes.

"Floored the pious man on his own ground. It's a trap of mine. I often set it for one of the clergy, only I never can get 'em to put any money on it. Fetch the book down. *She* has it, I know. I'll show you the very page—the girl and the goat—Maria of What's-its-name. That's fine writing—the little grisette and the gloves."

Doctor Cameron interrupted him. "I know," he said; "I believe you are right, and I own myself wrong. My zeal carried me away. There is no harm in it."

"Come," said she, "that's a generous admission. Now, Lord John, I will not have *my enemy* plagued any more. Let us talk socially and enjoy the good things of life. Here is some game, I hope done to your liking. Do you recollect the poor Digby game?"

"With all my heart," said Lord John. "Shall we have a glass of wine together? Come, your Reverence; hang all unkindness."

The two gentlemen had their glass of wine. Mrs. Lepell struck in—

"Doctor Cameron has seen the world, and tells some very amusing adventures."

"Been in Paris?" interrupted Lord John.

The other had been in Paris, and to Lord John's surprise, knew a good deal of the best cafés, and even of the shows.

"There was a time I was devoted to that sort of thing, and to the charming theatres, and the sights. What delightful nights—and society, too. I had a friend that knew all the authors, and actors, and artists."

Lord John's eyes were beginning to twinkle with interest. He was going to add—"and actresses and dancers, eh, my boy?" but he forebore; he found that the Doctor had even a special knowledge on these subjects—not the mere surface one of outsiders. The two began to warm up. The old lamps seemed to be lighted—the music began to play—and the austere sense of the Doctor to soften by the recollection. ("Ah! I took his measure at once," said Lord John. "He's a lad, or a sort of lad! The old man of sin is under his white choker, or I'm no sinner myself.") Then he told some of his adventures—out at the Havana, or on board the emigrant ship, which interested Lord John. The claret was exceedingly "nice."

Helen, who had not spoken a word the whole time, though often addressed complementarily by Lord John, listened with an absorbed interest. The night went by charmingly; the ladies did not rise to go away, for Lord John had whispered Mrs. Lepell—"For God's sake, don't leave me to his Reverence."

It was eleven o'clock when they went up to the drawing-room, for coffee. Lord John came up last and more slowly—there was a glass or so to finish.

Mrs. Lepell whispered the Doctor on the landing, "Enemy as I am, I must own to have been all wrong. You were charming to-night. I could not have believed it. Why, you are more a man of the world than *he* is. How did you do it?"

"You are convinced then?" he said, a complacent smile coming on his lips. "I am glad of it. You will own in future that there is no opposition between religion and duty and knowing the world. That was all I cared

to show you. I own, too—enemy as you call me—that we have had a very pleasant evening.”

“And,” said she—they were now in the drawing-room—“did you see the good work you have done? I never heard *him* talk that way before. So decorous, so proper, so sensible, so *reverent*. It is like a miracle. You seem to have some strange influence over him—as indeed you seem to have of *some sort* over everyone—even over me. Do you know I am terribly afraid of you?”

He became cold in a minute. “Are you?” he said. “Not that I want to conciliate or bring you over. No, indeed. I know we shall have to fight it out, as they say. We are in opposite interests. You are full of prejudices against me and——”

Enters now Lord John in great good humour. “Give us a song, Mrs. L.,” he said. “Do you, Sir—do you remember that thing little Daxe used to sing on the Boulevards, in what’s his name’s café—‘Ma tulipe’—do you remember?” And his Lordship began to chant—

“Ma tulipe noire,
Re-posez dans mon sein :
C’est ma mi-e !—ma mi-e !
C’est ma gloire.
Allons !—les verres pleins,
Versez, Messieurs, Oh ! je vous prie !

“Chorus !” called out his Lordship, gaily, and waving a match-box off the chimney piece.

“Ver-sez !
Ver-sez !
Versez, Messieurs, Oh ! je vous prie !”

“Confound it, I forget the next verse. It’s ten years ago since I heard it.”

What was his astonishment when the Doctor began in a low voice—

“Ma tulipe noire,
Restez sur mon cœur ;
Où peut-on voir
Une plus charmante fleur ?

Peste ! on ne peut croire,
Ma mie—ma belle mie !
Comme elle aime à boire.
Versez, Messieurs, Oh ! je vous prie ! ”

“Chorus !” again called out Lord John, waving his match-box.

“Versez !
Oh ! versez !
Versez, Messieurs, je vous prie ! ”

“You’re a wonderful fellow,” he said, going up to the Doctor. “Gad, you must come and dine with me some night at the club.”

There were numbers whom Lord John asked to dine with him at the club, but always on “some night.” Still the Doctor smiled again complacently. He had wonderful victory that night, and looked over to see the effect upon his enemy. She had listened with surprise, also ; but just as the chorus was in “full swing” her ear had caught another sound, the roll of cab wheels stopping short suddenly at the door. She was living now in such times, and in such excitement, that every indifferent action had for her a significance. She stole over to the window, looked out, and saw that a cab with luggage on the top was at the door. She knew in a second who it was, and with a smile of approval to both gentlemen for their song, floated out of the room.

Lord John, always watchful and suspicious, had noticed the visit to the window and her disappearance. There are some who make cause and effect out of every two actions that merely succeed each other. “What the devil is she at now ?” he said, impatiently, and walked over to the window. “Why, who in the name of imposition has she got here in a cab ? And luggage, egad ! Is she goin’ to bolt with a feller ? I wouldn’t put it past her.” The Doctor came over and looked also. He saw a gentleman get out. He wondered within himself. He was disturbed.

"Phew!" said Lord John. "I bet you a guinea it's that fellow Severne back again. I wouldn't put it past her."

The Doctor started. "Severne," he said. "The one that was to have married Miss Palmer?"

"His own body!" said the other. "The same that broke out of jail. What infernal trick is she at now?"

By the look of impatience and anger that was on the Doctor's face, it was evident that much the same thought was in his mind.

Mrs. Jenny had fluttered down stairs full of hope and joy, and even anxiety, for this latter passion does at times wait on the other two. She had never dreamed of this—that return she had looked forward to as a hopelessly far off business; and there were such events going on. What had brought her hero *back*? As she appeared, Severne—looking handsomer than ever, only a little bronzed—ran to meet her with great warmth, and took both her hands in his.

"My little preserver," he said, affectionately. "Here I am back again; and I am so glad!"

He looked down on that pleased and glowing face, and read the joy that was in her eyes and trembling on her lips. For it has been mentioned that one corner of Jenny's heart was filled with a regard and admiration for this chivalrous man—a feeling, of course, tempered by the superior regard and admiration which every correct wife is bound to entertain for her husband.

"And I am so glad, too," she murmured. "I thought it was months away, or years perhaps."

"As far off as that night was," he said, kindly. "Do you remember it? That terrible night when you broke through the dungeon walls like a white-robed angel. If I was to live a thousand years, I should never forget you on that night. As I told you then—do as you like with me for my natural life. How is"—and he stopped, for the association was awkward—"I mean, Mr. Lepell."

Her eyes fell on the ground. She told him he was poorly enough—struggling on.

"And yourself," he added, in the same kind tone.

"You must tell me all about that; and I will tell you all about myself, too, for you have a right to know. I and his Lordship have come over. He could not stand that place after what happened. The poor widow is still hovering between life and death."

(Our Jenny would have given the world that it had been a lady who was giving this little narrative, as she might have made a certain inquiry. But with Severne it was out of the question.)

"He will live here," he went on. "He can do nothing without me; he cannot let me out of his sight; he is eager that I should at once claim the inheritance that *you* got for me. You shall hear all this in detail. Tell me about yourself. How can I help *you*? I know how you are situated, and can feel. How are things going on up stairs? Has that Doctor been troubling you?"

"Not *he*," said she, looking down.

"Who then?" he asked, hastily. "Then there is something for me to do. I am very glad of it. A relation—or another Doctor, is it?"

"How you guess," she said, looking up. "He has sent a successor here, who, it seems, has taken full power. He does what he likes with my husband. He rules the house. I dare not resist him. I am too weak. He is the master!"

Severne was silent. His breast was full of burning indignation combined with pity for the gentle sufferer. "I am just in time then. I shall be here in the morning and confront him. I am *your* friend, recollect."

"But it *must* not be known that I told you," she said in terror. "Why, he is here now. There was a dinner," she added, ambiguously. "Lord John Raby—they force themselves in, these men—they all, indeed, do just as they like; but, hush!" she said, "if it was known—that——"

For a second, and only for a second, he looked at her a little doubtfully; but she had spoken so confidently, she carried herself over the dangerous past. "We shall change all that now," he said. "We shall see a different order of things. I shall come to-morrow, and you

shall tell me all your troubles. From this out we shall take care to make your life happy."

The door was opened, and Lord John's red face was put in. "Want my hat," he said. "Sorry to disturb. Hallo! Severne back again. Head over the water once more! Don't let me interrupt business (you should have locked the door, my friend, and I'd have known nothing). Good-night—don't stir," and his Lordship, whose rolling eyes peeped out of a strange half coat or cloak, "bundled away," as he said himself.

Mrs. Lepell hung down her head. "*This* is what I have to suffer," she said.

He was going away. "Lord Severne will be waiting," he said. "But in the morning—all in good time. I feel so happy to-night—so glad to see my preserver again. Good-bye!"

They had come out in the hall. They heard voices up stairs, a voice of expostulation, and a feeble agitated one. "You must let me down," it said. "I *must* see. I am not to be helpless in this house. Who is this at the door? Who are these men? I won't have it. I *shall* know." Such broken and frantic utterances was the unhappy invalid giving out. He had not been told of the dinner, it was the stopping of the cab and the sound of voices below that had roused him.

Doctor Cameron was doing all he could to restrain him. The heart of Mrs. Lepell—she stood in the hall with her protector—shrank within her. They were coming down. "Go! go!" she whispered, "you can see what is coming. This is only my usual lot." Severne knew not what to do.

What a scene followed. The worn face, the tall shrunk form, wrapped in a cloak, the hair grey and nearly white, the eyes flaming like coals, the voice high and excited. On his arm hung his daughter, terrified, and in a piteous voice imploring him to go back. But the sight of Severne seemed to rouse him to a sort of fury.

"So it is you!" he cried. "I *knew* it was. Something told me. What has brought him here? Is this *my* house? Is it to be filled in this way with rioting?"

Mrs. Lepell could only whisper, "Oh, speak to him—soothe him. What *is* to become of us."

The Doctor came down gravely. "I would recommend this gentleman to leave," he said. "I am Mr. Lepell's medical adviser. He is in my hands."

"You need not then have mentioned to him that I was here," said Severne, angrily. "I am not responsible for this scene, whoever may be."

"I am not going to be a puppet in my own house," went on the sick man, more frantically still. "I am not a child. Though I have brought it on myself, and made myself, and all belonging to me, miserable. My—my own folly! Oh, my child, Heaven has sent me this punishment for what I have brought on you!"

She clung to him, and sobbed out. "No, no, dearest, don't say that. All will be right yet."

The servants were at the top of *their* stair, listening greedily. It was an almost ghastly scene.

"Go—go!" whispered Mrs. Lepell, imploringly. "You had better. Leave me to bear. The sight of you only irritates him. You will see me in the morning."

Severne irresolutely turned away, bowed his head, and went out. With infinite difficulty they persuaded the unfortunate master of the house to go up.

Doctor Cameron came down to go away. It was past one. "A charming scene!" he said to her coldly. "A few more such, and your husband *will be out of this world!*"

She was looking at the fire, with her foot on the fender. "Am I accountable?" she said, turning on him, sharply.

"I would advise, for your own sake, that he should not darken this door, unless——unless——"

"Am I accountable?" she repeated, angrily. "Did I bid him come here? Ah, he is my friend, and *will be* my friend and protector! And you feel *that*, Doctor Cameron. I don't care if you are all leagued against me in this house *now*, and you at the head. We shall see a different state of things, now. He has been kind to me, and good, and will save me from my enemies!"

She said this with her eyes lifted to heaven, and looked really devotional and brilliant. The other hesitated a moment, and then said :—

“I do not wish to be your enemy—far from it—unless you choose to make me so. I *could* be as firm a friend as any other.”

She made him an ironical curtsey. “You are *too* kind. But your piety and religion would be in the way. No, no.”

“He stamped his foot impatiently. “Always that !” he said.

“Always that !” she repeated. “Good-night, Doctor Cameron. I am so happy. I never dreamed when I rose to-day what was in store for me. My friend is given back to me !”

She disappeared. He remained some minutes looking at the fire with the same impatient expression, then went his way home.





CHAPTER V

THE NEW HEIR.

THINGS had indeed altered for Severne. That fortunate gentleman had sprung up from the last stage of desperate misery into happiness, opulence, and above all—what is almost more fascinating—into a future of the most delicious hopes. Station, rank, honours, and wealth, worked for and won in due course by the recognised aids—what are these beside the enchantment of the change from misery and squalor to ease and comfort—to the exquisite sense of being lifted from want and ruin to joy, happiness, and security! Down sink the gloomy walls of the dungeon—kindly faces, ministering angels, and friendly hands are about him; the flood of light pours in—the gold and silver, the sparkle, the effulgence, dazzle. What can compare with the ravishing tumult of that moment, to be looked back to with a kind of wistful pleasure?

In no transformation scene that the most cunning of our scene-painters has devised—those gorgeous necromancers who revel in molten gold and silver, and spiritualised fairies, and all the rich celestial colours,—not one of these admirable gentlemen, I say, could have contrived a more startling change than what had taken place in the instance of Mr. Severne. Everyone was talking of it. The world, always good-natured in such matters, passed over the little awkward incident of that night which would otherwise have been a degradation, and only said it was “a perfect romance.”

It was all a romance, indeed. The deposition of Sir Parker Digby now quite secured—though that Baronet put a bold front on, and talked of conspiracy and forgery, and firmly resolved to fight the battle (under the advice of his solicitors, who judiciously thought they could at least make terms);—the death of the heir to the Severne title and estates; the strange and sudden affection of the present Lord, an old man—as ladies soon found out—of poor health, and “much shaken” by the last blow!—these were blessings that no good fairy surely could have been more bountiful in devising. Nay, the same ladies had presently discovered that the present widow was in a miserable condition—half frantic with grief and illness; and though there was here a chance that might be fatal to our Severne’s prospects, yet experience had shown but too surely how precarious must be any calculations that are based on such premises. The poor lady was ill indeed; her mind was all but overset. The physicians were gloomy; and any lender of moneys, with the facts fairly before him, would have joyfully taken our friend’s security and dealt with him liberally.

Happy child of fortune—favoured youth! Was it surprising that his return home to those who had always loved and esteemed him—to those who had always prized him for his amazing intellectual gifts, his nobility, generosity, powers of mind, and even wit, who had sought him and held by him in his adversity and degradation—was it not natural that the advent of this surprising young man should be looked for anxiously in his own circles? The way in which Lady Mantower spoke of him was generous.

“Lord John Raby, I won’t hear a word. I shall quarrel with you if you do. He is my friend—my property.”

“Egad,” said Lord John, “she *would* like him for her property—pair him off with one of her shoulder-of-mutton daughters.”

Everyone enjoyed the discomfiture of the Parker Digbys, for who does not sympathise with the young and generous? who is not repelled by the unkindly,

ungenial qualities of the near and stingy? The question was, when would the dear youth return?—would he wait till all was accomplished?—until the little chance which hung in the balance would be determined in his favour, and for which the prayers of many a pious matron were ascending to heaven—or, would the beatific vision be wearily protracted? No one knew. No woman could tell. Judge of the cry of surprise and joy that arose when it went forth that he had returned—that he was indeed come. It did seem as though the prayers of the pious had been heard.

What grateful testimonials of sympathy were soon showered on him. The excuse was, it was such “an interesting case.” His table was soon covered with sweet notes—invitations to this and that, and the other festival. Old friends and old faces—was not *that* pleasing?—crowded about him and inconvenienced his movements. He was not bitter, as he might have been before, at this reappearance of “old friends and faces;” even in some instances, of old faces and friends, who, with a reckless indifference to truth, merely claimed to be old. For he, too, was changed. He had become gay, cheery, open, generous, and unsuspicious. Who would not, when so blessed? And besides, a friendly world, as we have mentioned, discovered in him fifty other virtues and perfections.

A kind of a dash of chivalry seemed to have entered into him—a light of enthusiasm was in his eye. He was excellent company; and the old Lord, shrunk and helpless, sitting in his chair, was never easy when he was away from him, and delighted in his society. What was the secret of this exaltation?

He had never forgotten the rude shock of that night—even the thought of the unclean touch of the bailiffs made him shudder and tremble. As he told his friend Selby later, he had actually—in that dreadful confinement—been thinking of suicide, and much longer meditation would have upset his wits. When, therefore, the fastenings of the cruel dungeon were burst open, and the kindly figure appeared to him—arrayed,

too, as it was, in the spiritual dressing of the party—it seemed to take the shape of something supernatural—of some angel sent from heaven to free him; and on that night or morning, as he went down to Dover, he vowed—as we have seen—to be her slave and servant for life; and actually longed for some chance which would give him an opportunity of showing how deeply he was hers.

In the morning he came, as he had said, to Brooke Street. In that light she saw the change in him; his lightness and spirits; his handsome face—and that fullness of hope and joy. He was not thus struck with her. “What is this?” he said. “You look tired, and a little worn.” Our Jenny was pale, and a man with less penetration than Severne could readily divine the cause. “They are turning you into a nurse, or a slave, I see. So their persecution is weighing on your mind, as indeed it is no wonder. But, all in good time. You have your friends here now, and we shall do something for you. We shall not let you pine away in this fashion.” How grateful, tenderly grateful, she was for this ardent sympathy. How she looked, those who have made any fair acquaintance with her during this little narrative, may readily guess. Grateful indeed to one “who was alone in that house,” must have been such words of kindness. “I did not sleep well,” she said. “I *do* not sleep well, but that is no matter. The excitement of last night was a little too much, otherwise I have learned my duties, and can watch as well as any nurse.”

“But that is what you should not do,” he said; “and must not do. Does he sleep well? Tell me about him, and that dry, domineering Doctor I saw last night.”

“Hush!” she said, looking round. “He is here, up stairs; and I am sure knows that you are here. He is the master of the house, you know.”

“Insufferable!” said Severne, impatiently. “He is a mere adventurer, I can see; one of those people who get undue influence. But I’ll match him. The slightest impertinence or freedom to you, and send for me, I shall know how to punish him. It will never do to have all

this going on. We must get your husband out of this, and that will be the first step."

"How?" said she, wondering.

"Change of air. Don't you see? good for him, good for you. He is wasting away here, pent up in this close London. It is the only thing to do him good. His mind, too, I can see from last night, is morbidly excited. The green fields and green trees—those are the true remedies. He shall go, and take his favourite Doctor with him if he likes."

"How kind—how good of you," she said. "It never can be done though."

"Why not?" he said.

"Because they will think I have some scheme or design in it. That man will not allow it; and indeed we want no change."

"The change for you," he said, "I meant to be a clear house and freedom from anxiety, and some rest. I should propose *your* staying here."

She smiled, and shook her head. "Not to be thought of even," she said. "Hopeless."

"Nothing of the kind. I shall manage it. Leave it to me. By-the-way, your friend, servant, and slave has been thinking of you when away. Here are some Italian trifles I brought with me. What, indeed, could I give that would show all that I feel to you? It would be no more than the faintest proof of the life-long obligation I shall be always under to you."

She could hardly answer. "You overpower me," she murmured; and indeed she might well be overpowered by the gorgeous show that was now being spread out before her. Who does not admire the exquisite *spécialité* of Naples—the delicately tinted coral treasures—mounted and set with a delicacy as rare as the tone is tender? Not of the very faint "washed-out" paleness which a morbid taste used to hanker after, but a pure yet warm pink, which a more correct and natural canon has latterly established—Italian fingers are alone delicate and fanciful enough to set these treasures in their own natural attitudes. What lady's heart could resist being entranced

by such a show as the generous Severne spread out on the table,—Necklace, earrings, brooches, combs—what not? It suited well, too, with the tone of our heroine's hair and face.

Naturally she was almost frightened, as well as dazzled: for as we know, the world in one of its arbitrary fits of morality has chosen to forbid the acceptance of such testimonials, save under special relations; or if such acceptance be persisted in, attaches the unkindest and most ungenerous presumptions. Perhaps there is too much of this despotism—and our Jenny was hardly prepared to enfranchise herself as yet.

"I cannot take these splendid things," she said, shrinking. "Oh! indeed, no! What will they say?"

"That I would wish to be grateful; that I would try and show I like you—but fail. Are we so little grown up that we are to mind what 'they' say? I have had enough of that. Besides, why tell them?"

"Oh, I dare not," she went on. "I will take one—a little thing as a souvenir—always to be cherished," and she picked out a brooch. She was firm, resolute almost. "Even that man who comes here——"

"What! our spy?" he said, smiling.

"Yes; he would know it in ten minutes. He has some mysterious art of divining. No. I dare not."

Severne was not displeased. He shut up his treasures. "I shall keep them for you," he said.

Suddenly appeared at the door Helen, who had fluttered down with some message. Had she been sent? The little caskets were lying about; some were open. The two disdained any concealment. For Severne that sad face had always an interest, and he greeted her warmly.

"It is a long time since I have seen you. A good deal has happened since I was here. Tell us about Mr. Lepell; how is he to-day?"

She answered timorously that he was "*a little better*"—that sad invalid's formula which has been spoken and written in a thousand dismal houses where death was slowly creeping up stairs.

"We have been talking of him," said Severne, eagerly.

"He should mend faster. I have been laying out a plan—and I may do so, for I look on myself as an old friend. Why not remove him from this place to the country? Change of air does wonders."

The young girl started, and looked from one to the other. "No, no," she said.

"Are you afraid of your friend the Doctor?" he asked. "Perhaps he would not give his permission. Then I tell you what, Miss Helen, you are taking a serious responsibility. You should have the best advice, the best physicians in London; and instead, I find this raw, rough man, not old enough to have experience, and rude and uncouth enough to keep any patient sick. You should have Sir Duncan Dennison, or Mudie, or some man of repute. I tell you plainly, under such *laissez faire* principles you will see your father glide gradually out of the world. I am as sure of it as I sit here."

The young girl, aghast, stood looking at him, as if he was pronouncing a death warrant. A new truth seemed to have flashed upon her. "No, no! spare him—save him!" she cried; "it is not too late."

Another step was heard outside. The Doctor they had been talking about entered; his face was pale, his lips trembling, and there was a bitter contraction about his lips. Yet he spoke calmly.

"Mr. Lepell wishes to see you," he said, to Helen, "he is dressed. He *would* get up, though he never closed his eyes all last night."

"Oh, listen to this, Dr. Cameron," said the young girl passionately, "and we must try and get papa to do it or he will die—he will die."

"Do what, Miss Lepell?" he said, his lips trembling still. "What has this council settled on?"

"Something to save the life of the master of this house," said Severne, "and which if I mistake not, Doctor Cameron knows perfectly, though he does ask for information. He is a *religious* man, so of course he will tell the truth."

The Doctor's face became yet more pale, as he looked from one to the other.

"Thank Heaven, I have grace enough not to be ashamed to do that. The door was open, and you spoke loud. I *did* hear your scheme."

"I knew it," said Severne, smiling, "your face is not well trained."

"God forbid it should be," he said vehemently. "But this scheme, I tell you plainly, I do not approve of. This is not a case for change of air. He cannot leave the house; he is too weak for that."

"Well, let competent judges decide on that. Send for Doctor Mudie or Sir Duncan Dennison, or some man *of that class*. I am surprised you haven't suggested it yourself."

"I still say I do not approve of Mrs. Lepell's plan, and Mr. Lepell does not approve of it. There is no obstacle to her taking change of air. This may be *uncouth or boorish*," he added, with a voice that trembled, "but it is time to speak plainly."

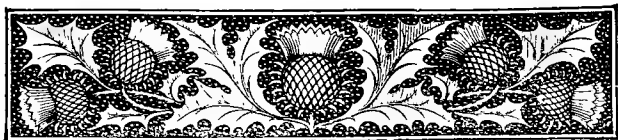
Mrs. Lepell was going to speak, but Severne stopped her.

"Let me tell this gentleman that the suggestion of this plan came from me entirely. And let me tell him also that one part of the plan was that *she* should stay here. Her health must not be selfishly sacrificed. I, who have been away, can see the change in her, which no one seems to think of."

Again the Doctor's voice trembled. "Now I see what the scheme was. That was it—was it?—to clear the house. I begin to see;"—his eyes looked from one jewel case to the other—"yes, I begin to see."

"Oh, papa, papa!" broke from Helen, "why have you done this? You will kill yourself!"





CHAPTER VI.

GIVING WAY.

ALL looked to the door. It was indeed an apparition of the miserable invalid tottering in, leaning on a stick. The usual feverish fire was in his eye.

"As you were all down," he said, "and I have been left alone, I have come down to see for myself. Good-morning, Mr. Severne. I am afraid last night I was a little short and put out. But I have not been at all well. I am *not* at all well ever since that accident. And no one seems to know what is the matter with me. But my clever friend here promises to get me well."

In that group was strange confusion. No one knew what to say. He went on, with an affectation of gaiety.

"I think I have been too much shut up. I am sure if I stirred about more I should be better. Indeed, I determined last night, after you were gone, Mr. Severne, and lay awake I may say the whole night, to begin a little to-day. And so here I am, come down. And if," he added, with a strange look, "there should be any parties or visitors here, I may take my place and see what is going on, and be amused like everyone else. Do you approve of *that*, my dear?"

Mrs. Lepell answered, "What I have always thought and wished for, if you had strength, dearest"—(a sort of twitch or start passed over his frame at that word). "Why, even as you came in we were talking of change of air and scene for you—of your going to some sweet

country spot were you would get well and recover your spirits. But Dr. Cameron——”

“Send me to the country?” he repeated, looking round at the Doctor.

“The house would not be broken up,” the latter said calmly. “It is proposed that Mrs. Lepell should remain *here*.”

The sick man half rose. “Send me to the country—I see, I see, I see it *now*. An excellent idea! But I’ll not do it. I’ll die here first, as, indeed, I deserve to die, for I have brought all this on myself. I shall not quit this house until they carry me over the threshold. What are these? Where do *they* come from?”

They saw he was growing more and more excited every moment. Jenny threw a reproachful appeal to the Doctor, but she thought she saw a bitter pitilessness in his eyes.

“What are these things?” Mr. Lepell repeated in a trembling voice. “Are they *presents*?”

Severne struck in eagerly and soothingly. “No, no, Sir; they were meant to be some trifles for Mrs. Lepell from Naples.”

The Doctor opened one, as if in curiosity. “Trifles!—yes, indeed; to what perfection they have brought this work!”

Mr. Lepell was opening and shutting the clasp feverishly. His eyes seemed to glare at Severne.

“But, unhappily,” Severne went on, “Mrs. Lepell will not do me the honour to accept them. Some scruples, which I am sure Mr. Lepell will be the first to——”

“Most proper; you are really so kind and generous,” said the latter, in the same gasping way. “You see—it was—worth while—coming down. I have done very well for the first day. I was right in taking your hint, my dear Cameron. What would I do without you?”

“Oh, religion,” said Severne, as if to himself, “how many things are done in thy name!”

“I have made a beginning, anyway,” he said, rising, “and to-morrow I shall be stronger; and I am determined if there is any little pleasant thing going on to have my

share in it. I think you were right—quite right—and Mr. Severne will take home his jewels, *for the present at least*. I fear I must go up again. Your arm, my pet,” to Helen.

She flew to him. “Oh! papa,” she said, in her piteous, tender voice, “you will do what he says, and go away. All this is killing you.”

He shook himself free. “Are you in it too?” he said, with an agony of reproach. “Then God help me, indeed!” Then seeing her face—“No, I don’t mean *that*. I didn’t mean to say that, my poor, faithful, injured child.”

After she was gone, the remaining actors in this painful scene looked at each other for a few moments.

“Why do you not follow your patient? I must say, Doctor Cameron, I admire the practical character of your religion—that stroke of sending him down here, at the risk of his life, and the little remark about the coral, was truly apostolic.” Mrs. Lepell looked at him with a quiet scorn and triumph.

“A rude ‘uncouth’ fellow can act but according to his lights,” the other answered.

“I am tired of all this,” said Severne, rising impatiently. “However, this I am resolved on. I shall send Sir Duncan here to-morrow. I know him very well. If Doctor Cameron chooses to refuse him admittance, well and good. We shall know what to do then. But, I presume, when the lady of the house——However, I shall be here myself, or come with him. That will be better. Good-bye, dear Mrs. Lepell, we shall take care of you, never fear.”

The Doctor grew white, as he was thus addressed. His lips trembled more and more. Severne went out with an air of almost jeering triumph. Then the Doctor spoke, and spoke slowly:—

“You have a wonderful champion in him?”

“Oh, yes! he is *my* friend. He can do anything. And how noble and handsome he looked! I am proud of my champion, indeed. Everything above-board—no insidious little strokes in the dark.”

"I suppose you despise me," the Doctor said, still slowly, "the uncouth boor, who degrades himself by such arts? Well, indeed, you may. I deserve *all* contempt. Why do you drive me to these things? Yes, you despise me. I know you do."

"Not at all," she said, changing her manner. "To be candid, I *fear* you more. Indeed, I must say, we have been baiting you sadly. But you drive us to it."

"*Us!*" he repeated. "Partnership—drive you to it with my uncouth behaviour. Us, indeed! I warn you to take care how you are going on!"

"I profess not to understand you, Doctor Cameron," she said, lightly, and tripped out of the room, leaving the Doctor alone.

Was it Patty, or one of the servants, that reported, that night, that she heard a strange passionate voice in the drawing-room, and peeping in, had seen the Doctor walking about, with his hands lifted, praying aloud, in a sort of frantic way? There was perfect truth in this, and he was making agitated appeals to this effect:—

"Oh Heaven! stand by my wretched and corrupt heart. Let me not give way in the hour of struggle—and lose in a moment what I have sought to win for years. Help me! Help me! Save me!"

Meanwhile, the unhappy Miss Palmer was lying on her sick bed—more sick at heart, perhaps, than she was in body. At least, she did not feel her pains and sufferings. The thought of her cruel abandonment was quite too much for her: her health was never of the best—though envious mothers, reasoning from her colour and height, pronounced her, in coarse language, to be "strong as a horse:" and it was not unlikely that she might have died under this cruel treatment, but for a fortunate turn in events. No young woman has, indeed, ever died of pure love, as has been insinuated often enough in the novels, plays, and poems; but, more likely, of the mortification, despondency, and loss of hope, which follows in the train. As for youths, and for the selfish youth of *our* day, the notion of *their* taking to their beds to die of anything but legitimate sickness, is simply an outrage on the good

sense and civilisation of our glorious, complete, and perfect nineteenth century.

Her mother, indeed, felt acutely the mortification of the situation. Were there ever cards so badly played? Too soon, indeed, the joyful news had reached her of the splendid Severne rehabilitation and almost apotheosis. Worse than all, there was no chance of repairing this foolish blunder: for she was wise enough to know that there was no profit to be found in clumsy excuses, explanations, and the like. Who cannot explain, be specious, and ingenious, even in the very teeth of the sternest and most staring of facts? Who cannot be sorry and penitent? Bad as the prospect was, she saw that the balance of profit lay on the side of dignity, and consistency, and steady adherence to the path she had chosen. Therefore, she had neither written excuses, nor sent to Severne. But she was a clever woman, all the time: and had that incomparable self-denial, which can *wait*, and wait, and does not grow fretful, and require action of some kind, and can well endure the protraction of suspense. This is the "game" that has won everywhere, since the world started.

The unhappy daughter secretly fancied, as she lay there, that some exertion was being made to repair the cruel error. That in the foreign mailbags were passionate appeals, or generous forgiveness. Nearly all her pride had gone, just so much remained as made her disinclined to ask her mother anything as to what she had done. The first gleam of hope was the coming of that Doctor Cameron. When he mentioned that he had been found at "Brooke Street," these words worked like a charm, and made her start up eagerly. She knew the number well. That house was, for her, the cave of the wicked sorceress, who had undone her.

The Doctor was greatly struck with her beauty, and from her restless eyes and excitement soon discovered the true state of things. This investigation was quite to his peculiar taste. His kind sympathy and manner, grim and stiff though it was, quite won on the young girl, and drew her confidence. She herself—her face, her dejection

—comprised the whole story; and very soon, when she had brought herself to mention the name of “Severne,” he had made out for himself much of the little history. He was very kind, very good, and very skilful in his professional way: like most thoughtful men of few words, if words well weighed before they were spoken, those words became doubly valuable. He saw the cold worldliness of the mother, and what little community there was between them: and it was then that he happily thought of the other young girl, who was all but alone in her home, and who wanted friendship and sympathy quite as much. There was foundation enough for an acquaintance in the meeting of Helen’s father with the Palmers at Digby.

“I know a little sister of charity,” he said, and then checked himself a little hastily. He did not relish *that* shape of ministration. “I mean, there is a young girl who knows of you, and about you, and would have an interest in you. She is not very happy where she is. Her home has not too many comforts, and she would be glad to see and know you better.”

When he said that she came from “Brooke Street,” the sick young girl eagerly caught at the proposal—it was a link, a little plank to cling to—for she had an instinct that her secret enemy would contrive some communication with her lost lover.

In this way, then, was the introduction managed. In a day or two the two girls were affectionate friends. For they had that one topic of common interest—that one object from which they both shrank; and—which, let it be said, is a yet greater and firmer bond of intimacy—a common dislike. How it strikes the waters from the rock! What enthusiasm, indulgence, and encouragement it kindles! what generous agreement it fosters! and in what pleasant loquacity—mounting at times even to eloquence—it whiles the moments away! They talk of wearing the heart upon the sleeve, but two girls together—one in bed sick, suffering, and disappointed; the other beside her, holding her hand, and wretchedness in her soul and a nightmare waiting her at

home—why, they take each other's heart into their hands, and feast their eyes on the minutest anatomy of each ventricle. And thus the two gentle children—for such they almost were—interchanged their hopes, joys, miseries, and suspicions. And thus Helen told openly of what was going on in the house, and Miss Palmer wearily rehearsed her sad tale and what she so fervently suspected. Between the two, a scarcely flattering portrait was worked out of the mistress of Seventy-five Brooke Street.

But now Severne was returned home, and on the day after—Helen had flown to her friend with the news—the old brightness—flash more than brightness—came into the sick girl's eye. There was joy and hope again, though in truth the face of matters was not very much changed; yet the fatal barrier of distance and time was removed.

Something *might* be done now. The ministering angel was in a flutter, and looked on herself as a chosen—a divinely chosen agent to bring things to a happy issue. Though, indeed, to do her justice, she was not conscious of the mixed motives which were working within her, or that the happy issue, which should bring Severne back to her friend's feet, was bound up seriously with her own.

"Leave it all to me," she said, enthusiastically. "I shall manage it. I can see already that he likes me, and feels for me. He has spoken so kindly to me already."

"But she—your——?" said the other, raising herself eagerly.

Helen dropped her eyes. "Yes," she said, with hesitation. "He was very glad to see her. 'She *saved* him,' he says; 'and he will never forget it.'"

The brightness fled from the other's face. She sank back. "Oh! I should be well," she cried, "and strong. Though, indeed, if I were, how should I fight this battle against her! When I *was* well, how powerless and foolish I was!"

"Leave it to me, dear," said the other, earnestly. "I am strong, and can fight the battle for you until you get well. And you will not be foolish again." For it need

hardly be said that Helen had been told the whole story of that unlucky pride and bearing of indifference with which Severne's pettishness and despotism had been met.

"Still," added Miss Palmer, "why should he have been so unkind, and turned against me so cruelly? I wrote to him—though I did not tell mamma—offering him everything I had. Why, I would sooner have died than they should have touched him, or that he should have suffered a moment. What had I done after all?—gone to a party. To which I was, indeed, forced to go."

All this time was working silently in Helen's little head a certain scheme of a bold and daring sort, and from which she expected the most remarkable result. It was for her friend. She would carry it out that very day; and when she took her leave—a ceremony accompanied with abundance of kisses—she had made up her mind "to make friends," as it is called, with Severne; and on that basis plead earnestly with him for her sick friend.

Mrs. Lepell had come down—now in great spirits—charmingly dressed, to go on some expedition. As she was descending the stair she heard Mr. Lepell's room-door open above. "Ah! I knew," she said with a smile. "Let us wait and see."

Dr. Cameron came down slowly. "You are going out?" he said.

"To some gaiety, of course," she said, pleasantly. "That is the sin, now."

"I have no right to inquire; but as you say it, I do know. And I tell you I can see what is beginning, and it is not fitting or proper."

"Nor moral—nor religious," said she, smiling, "to go out to shop?"

"Shopping, indeed," he said, scornfully. "I am not so blind as that. You are going to see that man—the man from whom you condescend to take presents."

She drew herself up. "Don't slander me," she said. "You know the truth of all that as well as I do. But it is hopeless to expect grace or politeness."

"I have never failed in that, I trust—at least not intentionally."

"It comes to the same thing," she said, coldly. "You have guessed right. That penetration of yours, which is a little wonderful to me, I confess, has served you. Well, I *am* going to see Mr. Severne—my true and kind friend; that likes and esteems me; that will stand by me and stand up for me; that I myself stood by in his adversity. Yes, I am proud of that, Dr. Cameron. Look as close as you like; apply all your fine religious tests, and you will find nothing to be ashamed of in that. He is my friend—my *one* friend in this house; and I am proud of having such a one."

With this little speech came the colour into her cheeks, and she stood looking at him haughtily; and, we may admit, having a good deal of reason on her side. He did not answer for a moment.

"I never can persuade you," he said slowly, "that I do not want to be your enemy. I would be even your friend, *quite as much as he is*, only you are determined to prevent me."

"It is time enough to think of that," she said, carelessly, "when you show some proof of your good-will. I like deeds—not professions, Dr. Cameron. If you really do feel as you say, then cease persecuting and misrepresenting everything. I do not understand even now! I must set off on these journeys by myself."

"A great hardship," he said with a sneer.

"It is," she said, gravely. "Perhaps you mean I am old enough to be going about the town by myself. See what I am driven to."

He hesitated. "If I were to offer to——"

"*You!*" she said, smiling. "*What* a proposal! The grave, serious, *religious* Dr. Cameron turning into a beau. No, no!—there is an incongruity in *that*! Besides, you do not deserve it as yet!"

He was colouring; but she added hastily, "Seriously, it is very kind of you; and I should be very glad, indeed, to be escorted by you. Pray, come. It is only a short way."

His face lighted up with pleasure. Then suddenly he shook his head. "As you say, it would be incongruous,

there would be a comic notion in it, perhaps. You would have a fine opportunity for describing it to your friend. No ; I have my duties here."

He turned away angrily. "Weak creature that I am !" he said as he went up.

Mrs. Lepell returned in an hour. Mr. Severne had had two lady-visitors that morning ; and the waiters at Starridge's highly fashionable and costly hotel—an establishment with all the retiring incognito of a private Royal brougham—had shown up two lady-visitors. His Lordship was ill, aged, and in bed. Severne was down below answering letters, and settling business matters. His own affairs had been long since happily arranged. One of the most pleasant moments was when Messrs. Payne and Hardy came grovelling, almost with tears—to his feet—begging him *not* to pay them—never to think of them at all, provided he would forgive them for the past. Severne was magnanimous, and raised the prostrate tradesmen like Alexander receiving the family of Darius.

"Mr. Parker," he said, "will arrange with you. All I ask of you—as you are sorry—is not to be hard on the next young fellow that gets into a difficulty with you. Be a little more of—a—and less of the——Well, no matter." The repentant tailors would have abjectly taken an oath that, for the future, they would be gentle to all, and were dismissed, fancying they had cleverly condoned the past. But Severne said he had a duty to society. The world is very strange and capricious in its way. Had Severne remained in his state of ruin, and been overwhelmed by those gentlemen, it would have been all in the usual course, but his restoration to prosperity altered everything. *Then* the eyes of fashion were opened to their villany, and the decay of the well-known tailoring firm may be said to have begun from that hour.

Severne, busy with his writing, was told that a lady wished to see him—"a young person," indeed, the waiter said. At Starridge's all the staff of the house were too well-trained to see, hear, speculate, or remark, where they had a guarantee in their guest.

The Rev. Mr. Sterne might have received his grisette

to show laces, try on gloves, take up stitches in his black silk stockings, &c., all day long without protest. The "young person" was shown up, therefore, with all the respect due to a duchess. He started with surprise when he saw her.

"My dear Miss Lepell—a visit from you! How is the patient? Sit down—tell me all about it."

She was almost frightened. "Indeed, Sir," she said, "I don't know what you will think of my coming here. But, *indeed*, I could not help it. And I know you are so kind and good—you will forgive——"

"Forgive!" he said, laughing. "Forgive a charming and engaging young lady for doing me such an honour! Seriously, what can we do for you? You know you must consider me of the family; and your—Mrs. Lepell, I mean—I never can do enough for her and hers."

He looked round as he said this, and settled the fire. When he turned again, he saw a change in her face. That name had sent light and fire to her eyes. "Oh, Mr. Severne," she began, "I have come from a sick bed—a poor, unhappy girl. And oh! if *you only knew all, you would pity her*! It was not her own fault."

Severne did not care to be man of the world enough to misunderstand. He answered hastily, "That is all too late, Miss Lepell. All that is over, and for ever. I can't enter on it at all. It is very creditable to you, and I can understand how you feel for your friend."

"Oh!" she went on, "there was some mistake. Indeed there was! She was always the same—always!"

"My dear child," said Severne, coldly, "you can't understand these things; you are too young, and too artless an ambassador. With anyone else I would not enter on the matter at all."

"What! I have done wrong? I know I have!" she said, clasping her hands. "Don't speak to me in that way."

"I am *not* angry with you," he said. "But as for *that* family—never! I shall never forget that night; the memory of all I was made to suffer is burnt into my very heart. I wrote to her from that—that den. I

wanted nothing from them—only a line of sympathy. But it reached them at their party—at their music, and they could not leave that.”

“Never! never!” said she, starting. “She told me herself ‘they never heard it till late the next day.’”

“Ah! that is *their* story; the regular excuse, my dear child. By that time the news of my good fortune was pretty well known. *She*—Mrs. Lepell—required no letter to tell her. True regard has an instinct of its own.”

“But,” said Helen, bewildered, “you *did* write to *her*. She did receive a letter there—from you, as I thought.”

Severne stopped, a little uneasy. “Did she tell you so?”

“I think so.”

“It was another letter, I suppose. That is no matter. You know how she behaved. I should have been raging mad, perhaps, before morning, had she not come and generously released me. She could find the money, and I do not blush to tell it.”

“Money!” said the young girl, hesitating. “She has none—could have none. For poor papa—his illness has run way with a great deal, and we were greatly pressed with bills at that time; and I remember she told us that week that there were only a few pounds in the house.”

But the young girl saw it was hopeless, and the despondency in her face touched him.

“I am not *in the least* angry,” he said; “in fact it is kind of you, and well meant. But I am not to be shaken. I did admire her, and do; I loved her, and perhaps do still. But all that is over. It was, too, a system too base and *too* cruel.”

“If I prove it to you?” she said, as a last chance, and putting up her face with a wistful entreaty it was hard to resist.

“We shall see,” he said, smiling. “Now we shall get you a cab and send you home.”



CHAPTER VII.

THE QUEEN'S PHYSICIAN.

THERE was not ten minutes between this visit of the two ladies. Mrs. Lepell was shown up by the ministering serfs at Starridge's with the same polite composure. She found her young hero with a little doubt and trouble on his face. The words of the young girl had sunk a little deeper than she or he fancied.

"Miss Helen has been here," he said, "to plead for her new friends, the Palmers. She sits with them, it seems. Our friend 'the spy' has brought them together."

Mrs. Lepell almost started, for this *was* news to her. "A good deal has taken place since you were away," she said, sadly. "They are spreading a regular net about me. Had it not been for your return, what should I have done? Setting my daughter against me!—that is moral and religious."

"Their story now is, that she never got my letter—was that right?—or until late the next day."

Mrs. Lepell again nearly started, but curiously enough she could think of a little bit of evidence that was conclusive. "Why, I saw the man come in myself," she said, eagerly. "I saw him standing in the hall. Had he not a white coat on?"

"Conclusive—convincing!" said Severne, half sadly. "The very same; that was my messenger. What deceit!

—what a conspiracy ! The worldly mother has indeed corrupted the unfortunate girl. Forgive me for listening a moment to these calumnies. Even out of *their* mouths came a proof of your disinterestedness and generosity,—that you had denied even some family wants to send that money to me——”

This she saw was also put, doubtfully, as a sort of question. And with a sort of warmth she broke out : “They have told that, too, have they ? Why, it seems I have been on my trial this morning. Yes, then, I own it. There was some money for another purpose, and I gave to a more pressing one.”

“I am ashamed,” said he ; “I blush for myself. Though I am glad it has happened, for I shall know for the future. Not that I am angry with her. Don’t let us talk any more of this. If ever I doubt again, or listen to such folly, remind me of this.”

“They will not stop at *that*,” she said sadly. “What about the Doctor, Sir Duncan Dennison ?”

“He will be with you to-day—I shall bring him myself ; that will turn our saint’s flank. And you must see him, too, my dear Mrs. Lepell. We must take care of you. In fact, that is the plan I have ; he comes to see *you*, you understand.”

Starridge’s waiters saw the distinguished Severne see down to the door the good-looking lady without the least surprise. But Starridge’s waiters had long since lost all sense of surprise. The foreign Princes and “Ducs” always put up with them. Mrs. Lepell came home full of thought, and perhaps of anxiety ; but in the meeting with her step-daughter, no one would have detected the slightest air of what was even *aigre*.

At three o’clock a plunging and scampering of horses, brought up suddenly on their haunches—a fashion which Sir Duncan’s coachmen were all trained to, causing a good deal of fretting and torture to the noble creatures he always drove—told that the Queen’s Physician was at the door. He bounded from the carriage, flew up the steps, so that passers-by invariably constructed an exciting legend of danger of death, and not a second to be

lost. Severne was with him. In the drawing-room was Doctor Cameron.

"I am sorry," he said, almost as they entered, "that Sir Duncan Dennison should have had the inconvenience of coming. But Mr. Lepell has firmly resolved that he will not see any physician. It's no use now."

"Mr. who?" said Sir Duncan, coolly. "Who the deuce is he? I have nothing to do with him. I've come to see a ——" The Doctor was a little taken back; he saw Severne smiling. At that moment entered Mrs. Lepell. "Ah, here's my patient," he said. "Now, Madam, what's the matter—headache?" Then Severne eagerly drew him over, and the three went into consultation.

"She takes no care of herself," said Severne. "She wastes her strength nursing this invalid. She says she does not sleep at night. Now, Sir Duncan, you must do your best and reason with her, too."

"Humph," said the Doctor, looking at her steadily. "Good colour—eyes bright. Hope, my dear Madam, I'll have the pleasure of taking you down to dinner soon."

Severne went over to Dr. Cameron, and in his blunt, off-hand way, said, "Surely he can't be serious. What does it mean? And let me tell you, Dr. Cameron, in a case like this, which may end we do not know how, it is incurring a grave responsibility; I would not do it in your place."

The Doctor's lips trembled. "You assume rather too much," he said. "I have nothing to do with the matter. *This* is only more of the favourable opinion you have formed of me, Mr. Severne."

"Well, frankly, you know what I think, Doctor. You stand for one interest in this house, I am for both interests. If I have done you wrong, I ask your pardon. But let us be open. This is a sick man's whim; you should know how to deal with it. Ah! there goes Miss Helen—let me speak to her." He hurried out of the room after her. "I knew she would," he said, coming back.

She was down again in a few seconds. "Papa will see the Doctor," she said very eagerly, "if he will come up now."

"See me?" said Sir Duncan. "Humph! very odd this. I doubt if I shall see him." And he looked suspiciously at Doctor Cameron. However, he did go up, with the same "life and death" manner, though there was no more leisurely gossip in town.

"There must have been some extraordinary mistake," said Severne, when he was gone up.

"There was none," said the Doctor, excitedly. "But I see it is time for me to leave this house, where I should never have entered. It is no place for me."

Severne and Mrs. Lepell exchanged glances. Severne, in his gay, careless tone, said, "What, beaten already? Give up the battle so easily—only a two days' struggle?"

The Doctor saw the look of intelligence; it seemed to make him wince. "It does not follow that the struggle is over, for all that," he said.

After a long absence Sir Duncan came down again. "I don't like his state at all," said he. "How long has this been going on? He tells me he has not slept for three nights; and if you don't take care he will not sleep for many more. He is excited. There is some strain upon his mind. He has been worked up into this fever."

"What do you recommend, Sir Duncan?" said Severne. "Should he be shut up in this way, moping and brooding as he is, or should everyone try to make him cheerful, and enjoy life?"

"No harm in that," said the other; "and it will be better for my other patient here. As for the sleeplessness, I shall send you a new remedy which I got from an Italian doctor; the most wonderful discovery it is. But I can only trust to Doctor Cameron, here; it's too ticklish a thing for common hands. Keep his mind cheerful, too. Above all, I can see he has morbid ideas on religion—something in the line of election, reprobation and that sort of thing. If that gets near him, good-bye to him." He took Mrs. Lepell and Doctor Cameron. "Look here," he said; "I shall send you this nostrum; but you

must be most cautious. Two drops more would be dangerous. One draught for the night, and no more, then, for two or three nights. And above all, keep them under lock and key—for patients get to like it ; so mind and be very cautious. We must get you well, at all events," he said, approvingly, to Mrs. Lepell. "No fretting or fussing, my dear."

All this time the Doctor had said nothing. Sir Duncan, as he gave his instructions, kept looking at him from head to foot ; then, as he went down with Severne, said—

"Strange hang-dog fellow, that medico ; sulky beggar, I'll swear. I like her, though. I see trouble *there*—moody, morbid husband, and all that. A little clique against her."

"Exactly," said Severne, eagerly. "I pity her from my soul. She is a noble creature, and I wish I could tell you of the *noble* things she has done. She has the finest, noblest nature !"

The Doctor looked at him askance, as who should say, "I see how things lie in *this* quarter, too !" but he did not make so direct a remark. He said, "Egad, I like her, too ; and we must freshen the poor thing up a little. There's my Lady Dennison giving a dinner next week ; if we could get her to that——?"

The Doctor went his way.

"Now," said Severne, coming back impetuously to the drawing-room, "you have all heard what Sir Duncan says, and we must all help to carry it out, cheerfully and resolutely ; and I can see in our friend's face, over there, that he is not going to be an obstacle. And for a beginning. Come over here, Mrs. Lepell ; I want a secret council, for *you* are a patient, too."

She went over with delight and alacrity ; she was very happy indeed. The gloomy eyes of the Doctor followed her over, as she took part in this conference from which *he* was excluded.

The young girl looked on Sir Duncan's verdict as highly favourable (she had not been told what he really thought,) and she ran to Doctor Cameron with delight.

"Oh! I am so glad and so happy! *Now* we shall get papa quite well again!"

"Yes," said he; but the moody eyes were still over at the window, watching that delighted confidence of the two, and his ears were strained listening for a word. He just caught the sounds "Duchess' Theatre," and then a sudden dropping of the voice, and a suspicious looking round *at him*. He hardly heard Helen and her affectionate raptures over the good news. He was thinking, "I am too *uncouth*, I suppose. They make their arrangements together to exclude me. They had better not. If I chose I could soon confound all their plans!" The intelligence, the meaning looks between the two, their perfect good spirits, all jarred on him. All that day he was silent and in ill humour.

Before Severne left, Mr. Lepell had come down, his eyes wild and rolling, and a strange fevered look about his face. His wild eyes went straight to the two so pleasantly talking in the window, and seemed to shoot through them. But he walked up straight to Severne with his hand out.

"I owe you," he said, "the visit of that clever Doctor—not but that I am quite satisfied with my friend here. It was very thoughtful and kind of you to bring him; and I am sure I shall get well. *I am longing to be well.*" He said this in a prolonged sort of moan, that went to the hearts of all his friends there. "I am so weary of being shut up here," he went on. "After all, if it is to go on, there is but little difference."

"My dear Sir," said Severne, "that is what he said. You are *not* to be shut up. If you would only take interest in all that is going on, and enjoy life a little, you would get well soon enough. Just have a few people here, and see any that come; and——"

"Ah! that is good advice," said the other, gazing at him with an intense stare, which was yet absent.

"Yes," said Doctor Cameron, looking at Severne steadily; "and it will do good to others also, Sir Duncan said. It will *cheer up and amuse Mrs. Lepell also*, and restore *her* to health."

The sick man started. "Ah! I see," he said, almost fiercely; "I mean—most natural, indeed, and proper—quite so! Indeed we shall manage it. I'll think it over."

He went up stairs slowly. When he was gone Severne turned to the Doctor and said sternly, "I understood your last speech perfectly. It was clever and *Christian*, too. How likely, too, to *soothe* your patient, and keep him calm."

The Doctor said nothing, but walked away.

"He is very odd," said she; "I begin to be afraid of him."

"More malignant than odd," said he, warmly. "The ingenuity of his last speech was truly pious. Mark my words, that man will give trouble yet. He has some design of plundering your poor husband, and we have interfered."

When Severne was gone, Doctor Cameron came down a moment to fetch something—to look for a book. Very gently she offered to help him.

"You are better, then?" he said, with one of his stiff, bitter smiles; "quite restored to health? When did this grievous sickness come on? Take care, Mrs. Lepell; take care. There is no crime so heinous as that of mocking a Heaven that gives you only too many blessings."

"Do you know, Doctor Cameron, I am weary of all this preaching," she said. "Mr. Severne is quite a relief. I must send for him again, if you go on."

His eyes flashed. "Yes, and get him and his Doctor to come and prescribe *amusement* for your sickness. Prescribe meetings — opportunities — secret talks! I understand. Charming Doctor, that!"

"*Sir!*" said she, rising, "you are fast bringing things to an end. I *will* not endure it. If he were here, you dare not speak so. You know you are secure in the helplessness of a sick husband, to whom I *dare* not complain for fear of excitement. Heaven help me! What have I done that I am exposed to this?" and tears came—or it seemed to him that tears came—into her eyes.

Very quickly his tone changed. "Forgive me," he said. "I have been chafed and worried. You set me this example. Don't — *don't*," he almost pleaded. "Don't do it. It is wrong and cruel; and he is a vain, empty, foolish man."

"Mr. Severne is a friend—a *real* rational friend. He does not trouble me with these extraordinary harangues. What am I doing, pray?"

"Ah! you can't carry it off all day long. Why do you join them? I with such a wretched, untrained, unsubdued, *wicked* nature——"

"*You?*" she said, in surprise. "Why, I thought you were specially——"

"There again—going to sneer; join with *him* in that. It galls—it chafes me to see it; I can't endure it. You a wife, with a girl like a daughter, and to go on in that way. What did you arrange with *him*—*for to-night?*"

She looked at him with wonder. "Arrange for to-night?" she repeated. "I am afraid this is a little *too* much. *Must* I answer? Now *really* I think this is all a *little* childish: unworthy of a *great mind*—of a good mind. Don't you see, too," she went on, in a tone of good-humoured expostulation—"don't you see that the natural result of all this watching and worrying of poor me must be to associate *you* with everything that is unpleasant and disagreeable. You would not like that, I know."

She kept looking at him with a kind of amused expression.

He was fast losing his readiness—his blunt and offensive manner, his rough tone of speech. Was it that some greater absorbing ideal had clogged his thoughts foolishly and stupidly? Was it that a flush of absurd shyness, suspicion, and anger came altogether and confused him? He had nothing ready to say.

"Why," she went on, "see Mr. Severne, how he goes on—always cheerful and good-humoured. It is delightful to see him."

"I am sick of it!" he burst out, impatiently. "Sick

of that name, weary—tired of hearing it quoted ;” and without a word more he left the room.

She looked after him, smiling. “So far good,” she said to herself. “Poor soul! I could almost pity him.”

All that day Mrs. Lepell sat at home. At times Dr. Cameron came down restlessly to seek for something, but as *she* thought, to watch her. He went away later, but returned to dinner and sat with his patient. At nine o'clock he found she was still at home : at ten he came down to go away.

“Well, Doctor Cameron,” she said, “what about this appointment? Come, you did me a little injustice. Such a *strange* outburst to-day. Why, if anybody was listening, they would say it was—it was——Come, admit you were a little hasty.” And she put out her hand : he took it.

“I admit,” he said, slowly, “that I am the most weak, foolish, helpless creature that walks this earth. I could have scourged myself to-day after I left you. You must have indulgence for me. I have not been well myself;” and with this justification, the Doctor hurried away as if he feared to remain a moment longer. Again Mrs. Lepell, resting her cheek upon her hand, smiled to herself.

On the next day a note was brought to her from Severne. On that day the Doctor did not come at all. About four Lord John dropped in, in a very bad humour, inclined to pick a quarrel, and very ill-natured. “No levée going on?” he said. “No men here?—wonderful. Where’s the restored insolvent—the chivalrous, bright-eyed Severne? Capital game, capital game — if it succeeds.”

“I never understand you, Lord John,” she said, calmly.

“Oh no, of course ; innocent—all innocence ; in a spotless robe of virgin-white. Of course. Halloo ! what’s this? Tickets! Box No. 10. Royal Duchess’ Theatre. Mr. Severne and party. This very night. Very good—very good. A nice arrangement.”

"I was thinking," she said, innocently, "would you care to go? No; I suppose you have your charming widow, Lord John. Everybody is talking of *that* conquest."

"Everybody talking," repeated he, maliciously. "Of course, you go to the clubs, don't you? You are out three balls of a night, aren't you? At all the best houses, too. My dear, don't talk in that absurd way to *me*. You only expose yourself. Everybody talking!—ha, ha! How good! Well, what about my widow, as you call her? Let me know."

She was a little scared. There was so much vindictiveness in his tone. He was a vicious old Lord, his enemies said.

"So you are off junketting to-night?" he went on. "I bet you he knows nothing of it. Come, no imploring looks. You know he doesn't. What if a letter comes to-night to him by the penny post when you are gone, my lady? What would you say to that now—for a joke, you know?"

She *did* look frightened at that note—for a joke.

"I knew it," he went on, pleased. "I tell you, you'll get yourself into a scrape. So you have really picked up with that donkey—that prime ass, Severne; that every man could turn round his fingers; that was goose enough to let a few tradesmen—I am ashamed of you, Mrs. Lepell. I am, from my soul. I thought you were a woman on a higher line altogether—that had wit, and saw into things."

"I am sorry to have lost your good opinion," she said, humbly; "which, however, was too flattering altogether. Mr. Severne was very kind and friendly to me: he wished to please me, and he succeeded. He has always held fast by me and never changed; while you, Lord John—you—have deserted your old friend for the charms of a rich widow. Ah! *you* have no right to bring me to an account."

"Oh, pish! fiddledee!" said Lord John. "This is all got up. You know what that means," added he, really defending himself. "We must look to the main

chance. Between ourselves, I am rather *criblé*; and though I know how to deal with curs, still I don't want to be worried *now*."

As he rambled on he grew less displeased, and gradually worked himself into a more complacent humour. These "transparent" devices which we say "Pish!" to, and "Come now, that's *rather*," if they have at all even a pinchbeck air of truth, gradually come to be accepted. The common hackneyed forms of "humbug" often have a power of their own—it may be because they are thought too "transparent."

Then Lord John became more confidential. "So you'd persuade me, you don't quite like it. But if you knew—— It's too good a thing to be let go. A rich lump of ore among the spindles; but what's that to me? A fine thumper herself. You saw her that night. But what's that to me? Do you think there's love in the business, my little Arcadian? *Not* a bit! She'd give one of her fat ears to be Lady John. And I'd give—just the trouble of going to church, and just a little duty, and no more, to have her ten thousands. There's the way we do it, my little green eyes. So you are going to the Duchess's to see that Frenchman, eh? Taken to twisting that poor, soft spooncy round your finger? Ugh! there's my old complaint coming on fast."

Sherry presently found its way in, and his Lordship went in a much pleasanter humour than he had entered. Still he said, as he went down stairs, "D—d knowing, artful jade! She's as like"—a lady whom he had known in a neighbouring country, and whose name is of no importance—"as one of their infernal dames here is to another."





CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE DUCHESS' THEATRE.

THAT night, about seven, she went up to her room to dress. She was carrying out Sir Duncan Dennison's kind prescription : she came down charming. Lord John would have told her in comic raptures—peculiarly his own privilege—that she was "*charmante !—ravisante !—éblouissante !*" She did not deserve such high-flown epithets, but there was a certain piquancy about her. She had arranged everything very happily in reference to the leaguers in the house, who were bound to watch and harass her.

Doctor Cameron was not coming until the morning ; and she had said calmly to her daughter, as we may call her, " I am going out to-night to the theatre with a party, for a little amusement."

" You are !" said Helen, colouring. (Poor child, she was not ready of speech—never knew what to say at the right moment ; so this friendly flush came rushing in and helped materially.)

" Yes, I am," said the other. " I *am* going to be guilty of that heinous offence ! I have not been at the theatre for years. I have been told to give myself a little amusement. It will, of course, travel to your father ; and he will be only excited, in defiance of the Doctor's orders. This is not my concern : a *really* affectionate daughter will know what to do."

A carriage was at the door : a flash of white from opera cloaks could be seen in the window. Mrs. Lepell was

"called for." She went down and "floated" out, as it seemed to pinched "shirt-making" girls who stood to watch. These are cheap glimpses for the squalid. To such the short glimpse of light and beauty (they cannot know these beings as their own mortal sisters!) must be a glimpse of Paradise.

Severne—truly delicate, and even chivalrous—had "done the thing" correctly. Mrs. Fox Bouchier and her husband were the party. Miss Fox Bouchier also. Are there kindly generous ladies enough always ready to consult a wish of a youth like Severne? There was a "reserve" of a dozen—ay, and more—whom he could have called on for that duty. "Take a friend of yours, Mr. Severne! We shall be charmed. Mr. Fox can go in a cab. What time shall we call?" More marvellous still, these ladies had seen the charming French actor; but friendship can make many such sacrifices. There are youths who have the art of casting this spell. The friendly *accolade* they gave her was wonderful. They knew her little story. There was no restraint as they drove to the playhouse. Severne, with "delightful tact," smoothed everything away. He was pleased, too, at the way his *protégé* had behaved.

Lord John Raby—who liked the theatre, and would like it to his grave, as long as his bleared eyes could see—as long as there was a powerful glass that could help old and misty eyes (that he might be deaf he did not so much care)—had found his way there. He knew the French actor, and swore often that "he was worth the whole tribe of beasts and boors then on the English boards;" and the French actor was glad to meet one who knew the inner French gay life so well. Lord John was free of the stage, too, which he liked very well. "Ah, *mon enfant!*" he said very often, "there you break down. What are you, after all, without decent women to support you? What are these creatures?—take the best of 'em, they walk and talk like cooks. Do you remember the girl you played with in the "*Petite Coquine?*" what a spice she had!—what life!—what grace—what devilish grace!—She had the *diable au corps*, that child;

and yet as ignorant as a monkey ! But then where's the English ? Even with your broken English, my dear friend, she'd turn all our heads here ; and, what *you'd* care more for, bring the *francs* in." For even with his dear friends our amiable Lord could not but have his jest and compliment.

On this night he was in "waiting," as he said himself—attending the stout widow. He had, what he called, "taken a box," that is to say, worried the French actor for one ; though at this season, and with a successful "run," such favours were a present of so much money. "D—n 'em !" said Lord John to himself. "Deuced glad they ought to be to have decent people here at all." He made a great flourish of this present to his widow ; who, wealthy as she was, was infinitely pleased at a saving of the kind. They went in state, having given the slip "to the relations," who were not at all desirous of the alliance—a brother and sister especially. Lord John chuckled over all this ; but as soon as they were established in their box, and he had begun to range the house with his strong glasses, he detected the party in No. 10. His eyes, as we have said, were not very strong. The glare of gaslight during many years and many orgies had affected them, and in some haste he began to clean the glasses carefully. He looked again. It was quite true ; and the widow heard him muttering—*grommélant*—noisily, behind—

"More of her tricks—d—n— ! What is she at ? *I* can see. On the sly, I suppose ; and that soft donkey too !" The widow looked round ; and, accustomed to these private bursts of discontent, spoke to him without guessing the reason. He hardly answered her. At the second act he had gone round to see Legai. "These fellows expect it, you know." He stood moodily at the back, growling and sneering half-audibly, and all but quarrelsome to the man whose domain he had invaded. Severne, much annoyed, and hoping he would retire every moment, bore it with an enforced good humour. When Mrs. Lepell grew naturally enthusiastic, as the dramatic interest deepened, his Lordship openly scoffed,

though addressing no one. "How like nature and artlessness! charming, charming! See how we turn the water butts on! Keep the water-works going, my lads." Only for an imploring look from his companion, Severne would have risen and certainly put a stop to her interrupter. The play had begun. It was a full house, for the French actor was in fashion; not that he needed such patronage. In his own land he was the most elegant and fascinating of stage lovers—the most irresistible "Young First." Who had not seen at one of the great theatres the touching play of "Valentine," in which Legai—that was his name—had brought tears and sobs from a hundred eyes! The play was pronounced by some "unpleasant;" by others not so lenient, "vicious;" yet still the tenderness, grace, and power of the young lover carried all through. He became associated with that character. It was a great day when he came to England—to bring with him that wonderful refinement, that look and air of delicacy, which French players contrive to assume. For on our English stage the terrible air of stageyness; the coarseness of paint and patches; the rudest journeyman-work of daubing and powdering and general earthiness—a sense of "make-up," is always present. On the French boards descends an air of spirituality. The men and women are seen as through a film or cloud. They are glorified, as it were: their voices have a touching and melodious chant.

This was a great play, which had had a great "run" in his own country as *La Carrière d'un Voleur*, and which English hands had turned into a good English melodrama. Yet even with this rude "adzing" and hewing, the marvellous outlines of French dramatic marquetry, their elegant "joinery" of the stage, could not be overlaid. Their delicate fingers can do nothing ill; and as in their own cookery, can actually make a dish—where there is neither plot nor meat—by mere skilful dressing. What art! What truth! Not that mere broad aim of leading the interest up to the end of an act, which is merely elementary, but a whole series of such "leadings up,"—judicious suspensions and hopes deferred—an art-

ful playing on the feelings even in slight points, so as to fill in the time while the grander business is slowly going forward. In acting, too, our French player had brought his graces with him. He had tried, also, to train his companions into something of the graceful bearing, and of the soft and tender elocution which he had left behind him. But he soon found that that was hopeless. Meanwhile, "The Robber's Course" was having a successful run, and in box No. 10, was sitting an absorbed party, following it with intense interest.

The robber was at one time rich, at another time poor; and he had a charming daughter, who had been taken from him when she was a child, by some "good ladies," and brought up away from such unprofitable, though paternal, society. Later on, when she was grown up, he was about to rob a château, with his companions. It was the third act. The night had come; the darkness was abroad. It was one of the famous "set scenes"—a terrace on the side of the château, with steps down into the gardens, and a steep stair from the plain below. The drawing-room had glass doors, opened on the terrace; that room was lit up waiting for the countess, who was away at a neighbouring ball. The flowers on her table could be seen; the piano, the green-house. It was on account of this absence that the night had been chosen—and such pretty music was now playing—as the dark figures were seen gathering below.

Who cannot guess what is to come? Mr. Fox Bouchier did, and began to say aloud—"Of course, he is going to rob the place, and will find that it is his own daughter!" when Mrs. Lepell, whose glowing face was bent forward into the darkened theatre, looked round reproachfully. Severne, interested himself, was indignant. He was not ashamed to be absorbed in a stage-play, and boasted that he had not outlived such emotions. "Let us hear, please," he said, coldly. "You see everyone else is listening." The "coarseness" of the husband was, as the wife said later, properly rebuked. Mr. Severne's views on this point, or indeed on any other, were indeed cordially supported. But between him and Mrs. Lepell this agreement of

enjoyment was a fresh bond. Now they followed breathlessly the trailing string of robbers ascending the steps cautiously. The contrast between the tranquil and refined boudoir and these unlawful marauders added to the effect. The slow music rose and fell. Suddenly there was a cracking of whips and the sound of wheels. They were all on the terrace, pausing to know what to do ; but here was the Countess come home !

The dark figures seemed in confusion ; but what difference did that make ? The Count, himself, was away. A maid—a few servants—these could make little difference. Then she could be seen through the windows, in her flowers and opera cloak. She sits down—she rises, opens the window, and looks out. The others crouch close to the wall, in the shadow. She sits down again, and begins to write. The truth is, she is waiting for somebody. There was an elegant Victor at the ball—a Count, but not her husband. There is a whispering going on outside—they are impatient. After all it is only a woman—she is alone. The arch robber gruffly plans the attack, and will lead. The window is opened softly ; a cry—a cry from him as well as from her. In that moment he had recognised his daughter. It was too late. The others could not understand—he could not check them nor defend her. But she was out on the terrace in her opera cloak and flowers, screaming for aid. Now the alarm bell sounds, and there is a cry from below—there is confusion. In the midst of which there is a shot, and the unhappy Countess falls.

Severne and Mrs. Lepell, both in front, drew back with a sigh of relief as the drop-scene came down.

“Charming piece !” said he ; “and how naturally done—no vulgar rant or tearing to tatters—no striding or hurry.”

“Oh,” said she, and there were traces of tears in her eyes—at least there was the redness or irritation of tears—“it is *too* exciting.”

At that moment the box-keeper opened the door, and stooped forward to whisper Severne.

“Good gracious !” said the latter, “what folly !”

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CHAPTER IX.

A RESOLVE.



R. LEPELL had been sitting up in his room. He was in lower spirits and more excited than usual.

"Why is not Cameron here to-night?" he said, irritably. "I suppose he is beginning to desert me, too. Why isn't he here?" Then he made his daughter read to him; but he listened fretfully and impatiently. To the sick, and to those weary with sickness, the finest speculations seem poor, trifling, and childish. He soon got tired. His mind was wandering away. "I am in great pain," he said, "my eyes seem starting out of my head."

"That is because you have not slept, dearest. But the Doctor has sent us his remedy, and you must take it to-night, dearest."

"Ah! it will soon all end, dear," he said, sadly; "and only for you, I would say the sooner if possible. And yet all my own fault—all! I blame no one. Even she—she, I dare say, cannot help it. It was I forced it upon her in my own ridiculous fit of folly. Now I expect her to care for *me*. And yet—oh! my dearest child, forgive this weakness and folly—I did like her, and do like her still, I do. Call it what folly you like. But I know she despises me, and laughs at me—laughs with others at me."

Alarmed, she tried to soothe him in this new fit, which had never been on him before. "She could

make me well—she knows she could!” he went on; “but she prefers to drive me to madness. That is her spirit. She has combined with that man—that Severne. He has been my ruin from the beginning. It was near his house that all this misery began. She likes him. I feel she does. I dare say they are making their plots together after I am gone out of the way.” He stopped a moment for breath. “Oh! what ingratitude—if she was only kind and affectionate it would soothe these sufferings. Fool that I am, I could forgive. Dear child, do you feel a contempt for your father—your foolish, weak, miserable father—as I tell you this? But I can guess what her plan is. Why does she stay away from me?—why does she throw it all on you? Down, I suppose, at this moment writing her letters—writing her letters—writing her letters—eh?”

The young girl cast down her eyes. This new fit distressed her. She knew not how to deal with it. In a moment he had grown restless and bade her leave. She went to her room. In a few minutes more a strange idea seized him, and he rose up and feebly tottered down to the drawing-room. It was deserted—there was no light there. The fire even had gone out. He went up again and rang for Patty. Where was her mistress? Patty, good and well meaning, had no feeling for mere sentiment, and told the truth, that her mistress had gone out, dressed, to the theatre. He said nothing, and she went down. But his eyes were long fixed in one wild stare on one spot in the room. Then he rose and tottered over to his press, where were his dress-clothes—now long disused.





CHAPTER X.

A SCENE.

DOWN in the balcony of the theatre, people—even at the most exciting crisis of the piece—were turning round to look at the grey-haired, wild-eyed, and almost ghastly gentleman who had just come in, as it were out of his bed. He had hardly strength to keep himself upright, and he was not noticing the play nor the acting; but his strained eyes were fixed on a particular box. An elderly gentleman, after a consultation with his daughter, had even said to him diffidently, “*I think*, Sir, you had better go home, you are not well, I can see.” But he made no answer beyond a slow turning of his eyes on the suggester, and he turned them back again speedily. They heard him even talking passionately to himself, and saw him clutching the box-rail. When the scene on the terrace was going on they forgot him, when it was down they found that he had gone.

Poor, hunted, harried soul! Was it wonderful that he fell into such extravagance? Who shall say that the scene that was now to follow was not of the most painful and distressing sort?

When the box-door was opened, Severne and Mrs. Lepell, and the lady and gentleman and daughter, all looked back, and saw this gaunt, worn, and white face, looking down on them like that of some corpse out of a grave.

Lord John described the whole thing at his club—

—*coram publico*—to many audiences. “It beat the ‘Ambigu,’ my friend. If a knowing French fellow had been there, he’d have booked it hot and hot for the Fifth Act. It beat anything I ever saw. The wife down in front, with the *servante*, and the husband looking, I vow to Heaven, as cracked as any dozen hatters you’d collect, and shaking in a fever, out of the bed-clothes, you know, standing and clutching at the door! I knew what was coming, you know. I never, never saw such a situation. ‘Go,’ I said, to him. ‘For God’s sake get home, do.’ But he never heard. I thought his eyes would have just burst out of his head. Says he, ‘I have discovered it. It was a nice plot, but it was revealed.’ He didn’t say who the deuce did so!”

It was indeed a miserable scene. People in the next box heard, through the partition, and looked on to see the ravings of the unhappy man.

“Come away,” he said, “or I’ll have you dragged away. I am not the poor sick fool you take me for. I have discovered your conspiracy at last. I am too long dying, am I? Not yet, not yet—for while I live I can watch—even if I die in the matter!”

“Shocking, shocking!” Mr. Bouchier called it.

Severne hastily rose, and went to him, trying to soothe. “For Heaven’s sake, take care. Do not, I implore of you. Think of all these people here—this public place. See, everyone is looking! You do not want to disgrace your——”

“I do—I do!” said he, in the same wild way. “Why did she disgrace me? And *you*. What are you? How dare you presume? Oh! what is this?” He put his hands to his head.

They never saw the last act of the “Voleur,” admitted to be Legai’s masterpiece.

A few box-keepers and loungers saw the wild, mad-looking gentleman helped down stairs. The people in the next box wondered, and told over their afternoon tea the strange little play that had been going on in the next box. “We couldn’t make it out, exactly, dear,” said

Julia; "but it seemed dreadful. Some lady, whose husband was sick, had gone out without his leave, and he pursued them to the box, though he was dying at the time. We heard them quite plain. The young man was very nice looking. Awful, isn't it? Have some more bread and butter, dear."

Awful, indeed. The unhappy Mr. Lepell was got home, the family being "bundled away" rather uncereemoniously, causing Severne to be pronounced a "low, ill-bred fellow."

"Get home, out of the way—don't stop chattering here," was his farewell speech. He was highly excited. "This is outrageous!" he said to the poor wife; "dreadful for you! No sickness can excuse it—I can make no allowance for it. A more cruel outrage was never perpetrated. Don't mind it," he went on. "I don't, I assure you. It has only proved to me yet more your sweetness of temper, and almost miraculous patience. He must be radically bad. That mean, skulking Doctor has put him up to it, I know."

In a moment the person alluded to came down stairs. "I can do nothing in this case. He is beyond my strength. I am sending for Sir Duncan Dennison. A nice night's work it was. Those who took part in it may well be proud."

"Indeed they *may*," repeated Severne, striding up to him. "I tell you, to your face, this is your doing. It is a noble action."

DOCTOR CAMERON (quite calmly): "What action of mine do you praise so ironically?"

SEVERNE (still more excited): "Your *religion* has taught you surprising command of features. You did not let that unfortunate man above, who is not accountable, know of this expedition? All to gratify your own rage and petty malice."

DOCTOR CAMERON (turning to Mrs. Lepell): "Is this your view also? Do you believe that I have done this?"

MRS. LEPELL (not in the least embarrassed, but after a moment's hesitation speaking out boldly): "Since you

appeal to me, I must say I do not. I know enough of my unfortunate husband to be sure that this is another outburst of his malady."

DOCTOR CAMERON: "Thank you for that testimony. Here is the servant. You compel me to this degrading appeal. What time was it when you opened the door for me to-night? Had he gone out?"

PATTY: "It was about ten o'clock, and I had just come running down from Master's room, in a mortal fright, to find he wasn't there."

DOCTOR CAMERON (not at all exulting): "You see you have done me an injustice. Ah, there is Sir Duncan."

Severne was a little taken back, and remained silent. Sir Duncan came posting up stairs three steps at a time. He was taken up to the sick man. They all followed.

"Ah! the old story," he said. "I warned you against all this. I don't know what we can do for him. A little more of this, and the man is mad." Mr. Lepell's case was indeed piteous. His eyes were fixed. He was breathing hard, and with difficulty: and he seemed unconscious of all about him. "We must clear the room. It is too close having all these people. Just leave me with him. You may stay, my dear." This was said to Helen, who had been standing there in a miserable stupor, almost as overwhelmed as her father. He was soon brought round. "No sleep last night?" said the Doctor. "Well, he shall sleep to-night. I have brought my Italian Doctor's remedy—a wonderful thing. There are six draughts; and now I think the best thing is to make *you* the guardian. Keep them fast locked up in your little desk. Give him one, but only *one*,—he will be wanting more, and one perhaps every night. But take care; they are not to be played tricks with. Two of these would be murder. So now, can I rely upon you? And see, you needn't say anything about them—that will be the best and safest way." She took the six little bottles a little timorously. "All right," he said, "we will give him one now, and you shall see." He held up the head of the sick man and poured it down his

throat. "In half an hour he will awake, and then fall into such a sleep."

It fell out precisely as he said. After he had gone, Severne came up to Doctor Cameron and said: "I owe you some apology," he said, "for I did you a wrong. I am sorry for it. I was hasty; but the flurry of all this business has upset me."

DOCTOR CAMERON: "I did not want this—I did not expect or require it, I assure you. If you will have more allowance another time, I shall feel that the handsomest *amende* you can make." With a bow he went away.

Severne said to Mrs. Lepell, when they were alone, "I believe he is not so bad after all—perhaps we have been hasty."

"And how generous of you!" said she, with enthusiasm; "another's pride would have been in the way. "It was indeed noble."

"Not at all," he said; "and besides, I didn't know. I feel an instinct about the man. This was a blunder, I admit. But still, no matter. What a night it has been altogether. And the worst is, I see nothing shining for the future. I am thinking of *you*."

"Never mind that. You *must* not think of me at all. My lot is to suffer—suffer to the end—all the days of my life. No release that I can see."

"But you shall not: that I am fixed upon. It is monstrous—getting too unreasonable altogether. I can see what this is causing. There is method in all this fury and madness. You are not to be the victim—no code of duties can intend you to be such. Really," added he, working himself into an eloquent fury, "such an *exposé*, such a brutal attack on an unoffending woman, there is something malignant in it! And now, my dear Mrs. Lepell, you must leave the matter to your friends, who will take care that you are not trampled on. You need have no fears about his health. A man that could do what he has done to-night, can't be very ill. I am afraid a morbid malignancy is more the malady that he suffers from."

"No, no !" protested she.

"Yes, yes, though. I know the world and men and women. This will be happening over and over again until you are worried into your grave—if you only give in to these humours. So now I have determined you shall just go on and take your amusement as the Doctor ordered you. You shall dine with us on the day after to-morrow; and Dennison's dinner?—you shall go to that, too. I insist. And as a sort of *amende* I shall ask our dry friend."

That potion of Sir Duncan's had a wonderful effect. It threw the patient into a profound and heavy slumber. The wildness seemed to pass away from his eyes—had gone altogether.

The Doctor remained on duty till long past midnight. He was going down stairs softly, when a gentle voice called to him from the drawing-room.

"Come in here, Doctor Cameron, for a moment," she said. She was still in her theatre dress, without her opera-cloak—flowers in her hair; and what with the softened light, and a half-pensive, half-sad look, seemed to the grim Doctor almost too beautiful to last for a moment. She went on: "I wanted to tell you—I was waiting up—how I admired the way you bore that charge—how noble it was! What calm patience!"

"It is very good of you to say so," he said, colouring. "Praise from you is unusual."

"And I wanted to tell you also, I did not believe that you had done what was said. No, indeed; with all our battles and hostility, I never, never have thought you could do anything but what is loyal and open."

Again he coloured. "Why do you say this to me—what is the meaning of it?"

"What *object* have I in view, I suppose you mean?" she said a little sadly. "Nothing, I assure you. It is said now, and that is all."

"I don't mean that, indeed," he said eagerly: "only it is so unusual. I don't deserve your praise. Still it is good of you, and I thank you for it."

"How stiff and cold you are," she said, warmly. "Why

do you not speak to me freely? I would give worlds to know your real opinion. I know what you thought of me to-night—the worst opinion—vain, heartless, unfeeling, frivolous. And yet—only I know it is no use saying anything about myself that *you* will accept — and yet I did it on principle. I did indeed—as I stand here!—to show that I am no slave and have a little independence.”

And she did stand there with her eyes looking up devoutly at the chandelier, and seemed to the Doctor like a suffering saint.

“Perhaps so,” he said, “most certainly so. But,” he added shortly, “for whom was this show of independence?”

She looked down and hesitated. “Why should I not tell you? It was for *you*. There are a hundred things I do which I do not mean. For foolish love of acting I pretend to be brave—I am a miserable coward; and pretend to be flippant, smart, and insolent—but all this is to cover my weakness. You must make allowance, Doctor Cameron. I am not the same now as I was even yesterday. These scenes are unnerving me. I am not guilty, indeed I mean well. But if you had seen what had taken place to-night—the disgrace, the *cruel* disgrace, the publicity!—you would have felt for me, indeed you would—branded, *degraded* as I was before a crowd, and by my *own* husband. I could have wished to die at that moment. What had I done? Gone to a theatre—what I had been ordered to do by my own Doctor. Oh! I am very unfortunate, very miserable, and without a friend to consult with or advise me.”

He saw her weeping, and remained silent for a moment. “Have you not Mr. Severne—your friend and adviser—who likes you, and for whom it would appear you naturally have a great partiality?”

“I?”

“Yes! You are in a pleasant confederacy together, and consult and take measures against the grim, stiff Doctor, who is the common enemy. Ah, you cannot deny that,” he went on, with a sort of mournful reproach.

"And yet it has not begun with me. No, indeed. What have I done more than my duty, to earn such enmity?"

"Because you disliked me, and so you know you do, and despise me. You have the worst opinion. *That is what has driven us to these conspiracies*, as you call them. Nothing I can do or say would make you think well of me. That I felt from the beginning."

"No, no," he said warmly, "it is a duty to dispel that delusion. I admire your gifts and cleverness—your brilliancy, and always *did*."

"You! No!"

"Yes, though you talk of confederacies I am cold and stiff and ungenial. I know I have nothing to recommend me. I have no powers of sneering and jesting as some men have. I do not envy them such. But still, had you wished it, we might have been friends, and I might have been a stronger and more powerful friend than another. But no matter now."

"But it is matter now. Why not still be my friend—stand by me—guide me. I want it sadly. Surely you cannot think for a moment that between two minds, his and yours, there can be a choice. He is very good and kind, and has done a great deal for me. I believe he likes me. I believe if I was free to-morrow——"

She hesitated.

"What?" he said. "So indeed I might have guessed."

"He would leave rank and station; but that is not what I crave. I must have something that I could admire—look up to—lean on. Something noble and grand. But I know what my duty is—that is a vain thought that I would not even breathe to anyone else, and that duty I am prepared to go through with down to my grave."

At this juncture the young watcher up stairs, delighted at the change in her father's state, and having been convinced that it was a lasting one, came down eagerly. She wanted something that had been left in the drawing-room. The door was half-open, and she shrank back as she heard the voice. That voice had always for her a repelling effect. She stopped, not indeed to listen, but

to decide whether she should go in or turn back. She *was* turning back when she heard Doctor Cameron in a low, trembling voice, say :

"Do you mean all this, and do you wish me to be your friend? No—no! you are dangerous and insidious. You are bound to his interest."

"You will not trust me. I see you will not aid me. You would sooner see me suffer, cruelly waste away in this bondage until I die. And yet if I had *the sympathy of a great intellect*—— No, you dislike me, and are bound to punish me."

"No, no; a thousand times no. How am I to convince you?" he went on hurriedly. "Let me give you some proof. I am rough, I know, and cold, but I mean——"

"Are you serious?" she said. "This is too blessed news! Then you esteem me and have some respect for me? Then you will show it to me by some act, some little act of kindness. I may look forward," she added, timorously, "at least to this. Oh! I shall sleep very happily to-night for this."

He had sat looking at her a little fixedly. Suddenly he stood up, and burst out with :

"Go back! stand away! Let me out of this house! —wretched, weak, miserable being that I am! that have struggled for so many years, and now find myself deserted! Heaven send me strength, and leave me not in this trial. Oh! stand away! Do not speak to me, I implore you! Let me go on in my old course!"

Awe-struck, and not daring to breathe, the young girl listened with beating heart to this frantic burst. She had not strength to go away. She heard his heavy steps as he tramped to the door. It was dark on the stairs, so he tramped by her without seeing her. Then she heard Mrs. Lepell say aloud :

"Poor Doctor, I knew it was coming to this!"

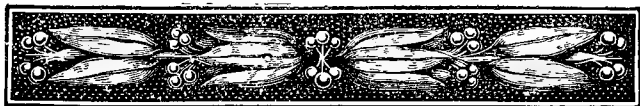
Helen flew to her room. In a moment she had flung herself on her knees, with her face pressed against her bed, and was weeping. "Ah, who is to help us now! Poor papa! poor papa! They are all joined against us

now. They will destroy us. There is not one friend left—not a single friend! What is to become of poor papa?”

Neither of these ladies got to sleep until morning broke. Mrs. Lepell was absolutely nervous from excitement. She was infinitely pleased—not so much with the matter itself and its possible fruits—but with the evidence of her own powers. “Such a power as that,” she said to herself softly, as her head lay on her pillow, “why, there are no bounds to what it may effect. *It may be Prime Ministers yet.*”

And, absorbed in that pleasing speculation, she went off presently to sleep. Who was the “Prime Minister” of this dream? Scarcely the sick man sleeping an enforced sleep above—scarcely the foolish Doctor, not yet asleep.





CHAPTER XI.

WEAKNESS.

BUT the condition of the unhappy man's daughter was indeed piteous. She came down in the morning worn, scared, and aged. Her father seemed to be better; but there was a dull heaviness about him.

"Was that all a dream last night?" he asked wearily. "I suppose so. What is the matter—are you getting ill, dearest? Has any bad news come in? Tell it to me. I am the proper object to whom all bad news should come. It will make little difference, and the sooner it comes the better. Where is that dear Doctor? what time is he to be here?"

She could hardly answer him. The sense of their utter desertion, and the unseen difficulties that seemed closing about her, were forcing the tears to her eyes. What could she do? And yet, if she did not speak, it seemed sure destruction for the father she so loved. It was like stopping a nervous being with a heart complaint, who was walking over a precipice, whom even the shock of such a restraint might kill.

"Oh, papa!" she said, in a faltering voice, "we trust him too much—I fear we do, at least. I begin to think he is against us. Oh, we cannot be too careful, for we have so few friends!"

The wild eyes wandered over her soft face a moment. Then he answered: "My darling, don't—don't let them persuade or turn you against your poor broken, wretched

father. After that, darling, the best thing for me would be to die at once. No, no ; Cameron is my friend, and yours too, the only one who has will and strength to stand by us."

What could she say?—what could she do? How could she wring that fond but loving foolish heart with cruel logic? What was her conclusion—to work her own little brain and rest on her own poor strength, such as it was? But Heaven, she knew, had often aided the weak—even those weaker than she was. Could she find no one?—and she cast about desperately, round the narrow circle of those whom she knew. She still was making her visits of charity to the Palmers, and her friend was mending slowly. Suddenly she recalled an honest trusting face, of blunt speech, good faithful eyes, and a hand that gave a warm grasp—Selby's, in short. He knew her, she knew him, sufficiently. She would write to him—go to him—and without delay; for there was a dreadful presentiment on her that all these "enemies," as she considered them, who were gathering about her father's bed, would proceed to the worst extremities. A wild but pardonable delusion in one so affectionate as she was.

It was on this day that Doctor Pinkerton came, having returned from his country expedition. He was in good humour. The country patient had been saved—saved from local assailants by a prompt reversal of their system. And he had received what he called "a good fat whopping fee" for his services.

"Well, my poor little girl," he said, "how are we getting on up stairs? Ah, I left you a good substitute—slow, steady, brilliant, and sure and straight as an arrow."

(Mrs. Lepell was in bed, not having yet risen. She was very weary with her long nights' vigils.)

"Why, you look cast down, my child, and cut up. He's going on well? Cameron wrote me so. No bad news, my poor little soul," he added compassionately, taking her hand. "What's this about?"

She could hardly speak—she was weeping. "Oh,

Doctor Pinkerton ! What *is* to become of us ? We are all very miserable."

"Nonsense. Sit down there on the sofa, next the old Doctor, and tell him everything."

Here was the friend sent specially, and made for confidence. The little girl, heartily affected by his affectionate manner, looked up into his face and told her story. What she feared—how little she hoped—the hostility that was gathering about them—the awful sense of depression and conviction that in that house horrors were to gather. When she spoke of Cameron, he started and "pooh-poohed" it.

"My dear little girl, nightmare, nightmare ! That pretty head of yours is all agog. He's a rock—might as well stir the Monument. I know very well the whole thing, and what it comes to. You don't know that man. He has no feeling, no blood, no pulse. I believe I know as well as if I saw him he was 'playing' your good mamma. He's very deep, that man. But just leave him to his game, whatever it is, and let him work it out. I am sorry to tell you we can only leave him a week or so, as they have got a fine place for him out at Demerara. I must tell him about that when he comes. Deuced sorry to lose him, too. No, no. That young fellow and your mamma—I don't like *his* going—but don't take on in this absurd way. Empty your little head of all these fears and terrors, and leave it to me. Now for papa."

He went up and saw him. He was a little startled at the change : but he talked cheerily to the patient.

"I am very glad to see you," said the other, "and very glad you have come back."

"To be sure, my poor friend. And Cameron, how do you like him ? Tell me what he has done for you."

"What he could indeed," said Lepell. "But it will do me little good. By-the-way, tell *her*, my little Helen, all that. She has taken some dislike to him—girls are so strange. Show her—you understand."

"Ah, exactly. Leave it to me : just what I thought.

So you've had another Doctor—the grand swell of all? What did he do for you?"

"Oh, such a relief. Last night was the only night I have closed my eyes. Such a sweet heavy sleep!"

"You must take care," said the Doctor, gravely. "That's a remedy there must be no playing tricks with. I hope you keep to the very letter of what Dennison said."

When the Doctor came down and was going away, Doctor Cameron arrived, and came up stairs hastily into the drawing-room. Helen, not at all convinced, had gone out in trouble on some expedition. There was a strange bearing in Doctor Cameron, a warmth and eagerness in his face that positively made Pinkerton start. And, above all, there was the strangest symptom of a change: *he had a little flower in his button-hole!*

"Where have you been?—where do you come from?" said Doctor Pinkerton, looking doubtfully at him from head to foot.

The other coloured, and grew a little confused. "I have just come from home," he said stiffly. "I did not expect you back for a long time."

The Doctor muttered something to himself. What was passing through his head was, "There is something in what the little girl said."

"You must have bought that flower, my friend," he said, sarcastically. "I never knew you kept such gracious things at home. No matter; listen to this. I was just going to write to you. Another opening for you, my friend. They want you out at Demerara. Noble ship going, and a fine berth—I mean in the colony. I tell you what," added the Doctor, "*I recommend you to accept it, and go at once.*"

"Go at once?" the other said, starting. "Why, when does she sail?"

"In about ten days, perhaps sooner. Take my advice and lose no time. So fine a thing will not occur again."

The other looked down on the ground. "I can hardly get prepared so soon," he said, hesitating.

"In the last ship," said the Doctor, "you went at a day's notice."

"Besides, here I am beginning to get something to do, and really, the climate——"

"Something to do," repeated the Doctor. "Why you told me this was what you were pining for—that the climate suited you. Besides, I have reason to know," added the Doctor, mysteriously, "*there are a crowd of poor emigrants* going—I took care to *make that out for you*."

"A charming inducement," said the other, half sarcastically.

"So you would have said, in earnest, before I went away," answered the Doctor, gravely. "You would have called it a harvest for the Lord."

"Dear Doctor Pinkerton," said the other, looking down, "I don't mean what I say. I am ashamed to speak so. But it is sudden—a little sudden, and, if you will let me, I shall think it over and give you an answer."

Doctor Pinkerton went away in a reflective state. "I declare the little girl sees further than I do, with all my sense."

But when he had driven away, the other remained walking up and down on the rug, his face almost contorted with grief and agitation.

"Miserable humiliation, and all my *own* doing. Oh that I should have sunk so low!" And as his eyes sank towards the ground they fell on the flower in his coat, and with a passionate gesture *he tore it out* and flung it into the fireplace. He looked at it with some satisfaction, as if this was a victory.

Now he heard a gentle voice behind him, and there enters the lady of the house—humble, cast down, yet refreshed by her long rest: she is in presence of her master. He noticed a great change in her, a kind of lowly timorous bearing, and a shrinking from his eye. At that vision the sense of degradation and shame, and alas! the wish for noble self-emancipation, all passed away. His eyes were fixed with a kind of passive regret on the rejected flower.

She softly and with the same air of submission said, "Mr. Severne has written about Sir Duncan's little dinner he wishes to give, and he enclosed an invitation for you."

"For me?" he said, starting. "Surely not."

"Yes," she said, "here it is. Indeed it is, the least *amende*. He feels it deeply, I know, and only wants to show that he is sorry. Am I," she added, timorously, "*are we* to go or to stay?"

"Do you ask *me*?" he said, half joyfully. "Would you be guided by me, if I decided?"

"Not yesterday, certainly," she answered; "but since our conversation of last night——"

"And if I say not to go?"

She shook her head sadly. "Well, it cannot be helped, we must submit. I was wishing to *show* you that I was not so wicked as you believed me, and this would be a good opportunity to prove to you that I *was* reformed."

He was in a tumult of confusion, poor weak soul. He had not even resolution to pray, and said, "Then I decide to go. It will be a little change for you—as the great Doctor ordered it also." Then with a fitful transition he became moody. He was a fool, a soft fool. This was a plot, a woman's scheme. "You are very eager to meet this Mr. Severne," he said, suspiciously. "He is a grand match, they say. You met him before?"

"Yes," she said, in the same lowly manner, "long ago. And he has a sort of regard for me. But he is ambitious—he has an ambitious mother—he would be in office. They are planning great matches for him, to form connections. Yes, he likes me; *but if I was a young girl, Doctor Cameron, he would just amuse himself with me, like other young men, and come some fine morning with an easy air to break the news of his marriage to me.* It is because he knows he is safe with me that he comes so carelessly. What if I were amusing myself with him, Doctor Cameron? Good chances of a future peerage—connection—pleasant country house—interest

—all these things make a useful friend, Doctor Cameron.”

There was a significance in her eyes as they rested on him. Her words seemed to convey a great deal more. She seemed to glide from his sight like a heavenly ministrant—an angel visitor *going to lunch*. For her little meal was waiting—below. Unhappy Doctor!

He stayed long, as she had left him—irresolute, dreamy; then with a sudden resolution took his hat and left the house. He did not return till late, though Mr. Lepell often asked for him. He spent that day away in the suburbs, pacing furiously, as if flying from some evil genius that was pursuing him. Alas! before long that familiar had overtaken him and held him in his gripe. It was about nine when he arrived. He had some purpose in his head, and had formed some distinct resolution, for he walked straight up to Mr. Lepell's room.

The patient, ill and feverish, welcomed him eagerly. “I have been waiting for you all day,” he said, pettishly; “others do not attend on me. No one wants me to be well.”

The Doctor was looking at him gloomily. “That is,” he said, with a hard grim tone, “as it *shall* be, as it is ordained. As with your body, so with your soul. Well for those,” he said, standing up and looking down on the other, “who, as they draw near to the edge of their grave, feel a conviction that they are so chosen. Evil, eternal evil for those who do not.”

This tall figure—his fiery eyes, his long arm outstretched—seemed to the clouded senses of the unhappy Mr. Lepell to be elements of a condemning judge. The head shrank away on the pillow.

“No, no, no,” he said, frantically, “a thousand times no. I do not let it near me. I never shall. It is a cruel, miserable, chilling doctrine. Better let me linger here in agonies than let it near me.”

“As if I can control these things,” said the other, moodily. “Why should I keep the truth from you, as a

foolish delicacy has hitherto made me? It is written in your own heart; you *dare* not deny it. *You have a conviction* that what I am saying *is* true. You know it in your heart of hearts, and neither I nor you, nor the holiest living, can answer that terrible question for you, or change the inevitable destiny. We are all of us creatures—wretched, helpless, irresponsible creatures—hurried on by furies, I myself the most miserable and helpless of all. But what can we do? Nothing—nothing: though we pray and pray again. Oh, it is cruel, dreadful, miserable, and despairing; but that eternal destiny *must* be worked out.”

The other listened to this strange harangue, delivered almost frantically, with terror and distending eyes. His breath came and went heavily. He seemed to cower under this terrible denunciation.

“You never said this before,” he faltered. “You would not speak of these things when I asked you and I wished you.”

He almost appeared to be appealing against a sentence.

“Can I avail you in the least?” said the other. “What are we all but mere worms, poor helpless sinful men? What can we do for ourselves? What can I do? Take me. You think I am good, and holy, and pious, because I talk. Don’t believe it; I am worse than the vilest sinner that crawls through the streets. We know not if there be hope for us, for you, for me, for anyone. What right have we to expect mercy, and not judgment, when, *after years of struggle*, everything goes, gives way, and we are left sinners like the rest, no better than the rest? Oh, it is better it should all end. Better that it should end the sooner, and have done with this sham struggle—this poor fight which is only to bring disgrace and ruin.”

He covered his face and turned away. The other, who could see the secret undercurrent of all this frantic speech, turned away with a groan.

“I knew this. It has haunted me through life.”

“Better to know it now, then,” said the other, bitterly,

"and make what you can of it. Take down your old dusty divinity, pore over its stained leaves, and see if you can get comfort out of them. I don't believe it. I don't say it—don't take it from me. I admit that this came to you from yourself—from others," he added, almost imploringly. "What am I, indeed, that I should preach or lay down gospel? If you only knew the creature I am."

For half an hour more went on this strange scene. The sick man, excited, with every nerve strung to the utmost, listened, as if he was in some delirium, to the wild denunciation that was poured out; and what to a sound and reasoning man would have seemed mere incoherence—mere unconsecutive rambling, *apropos* of nothing, came to his diseased brain as the inspired utterances of a prophet and preacher. Towards midnight, when Doctor Cameron had gone, he had called feebly to his daughter, who came to him, thinking, poor child, that one of the "soothing" evenings, rational and calm, had gone over with the best effect.

She was struck with the change. Every fibre in his frame was quivering and quivering again.

"Stay by me! Do not leave me!" he cried. "If I were to die this night! Oh save me—save me! I knew it. I knew this was coming!" with more to the same effect, which utterly bewildered and scared her. "Another night of agony before me," he went on, despairingly. "I cannot—I dare not be left alone. Stay, get me another of those draughts; that will give me rest. Quick—the very thing."

She could not do it. It would be dangerous—perhaps death. The Doctor had said that two were never to be given on two succeeding nights. Utterly overwhelmed by the crisis—unnerved—herself alone in that house, and with these horrors gathering about her, she burst into a passion of tears.

"Ah, you cry," he said, looking at her; "there will be something to weep for soon. Fetch it for me—go."

"I have not got them," she sobbed; "indeed no, dearest papa. There are none in the house."

Who shall blame her falsehood in such a moment of distraction? Like Uncle Toby's oath, it must have been blotted out for ever by the compassionate recording angel.

"Just so—just what might be expected. No one cares, no one thinks. Let me be cast out like a dog, and after that—Oh! Oh!" and he sank back with a half-cry.

That was indeed a night of horrors. The unhappy daughter sat up with her more unhappy father, and caught snatches of his ravings about final perdition and eternal torments. At times he got a few minutes' sleep, but only to start up with a cry. She could only sit by him and weep. About eight in the morning he did fall off into a doze, and then she stole out. Later she met her "mamma" on the stairs. That lady, fresh from a bounteous night's rest, was herself astonished at the worn and shrunken features. But there was a sparkle in those eyes which she had never noticed before.

"Your father, dear?" said the lady, sweetly. "What sort of a night?"

"You are killing him," burst out the young girl, catching at the banister. "You are killing him fast; and you are doing it on purpose. And I warn you, if he dies, it will be murder."

The lady was scared. "What is over you?"

"I know who will be the murderess, and why it is done. I can see. But I will not suffer it, even if I call in people to protect us. I tell you, if this goes on, I shall go—go—go to the magistrates, or someone in authority. I will—you don't know me."

"Magistrates!" Mrs. Lepell could only repeat.

"Yes, yes. I know what is going on, though you think I do not. I see it *all*—all that you are plotting with him. No, you will not stab him, or poison him, but you are murdering him among you all the same."

"This is madness and folly," said Mrs. Lepell, now quite recovered. "You do not know what folly you are talking."

"It *is* folly, I know, to protect my poor father. But

you shall *not* destroy him. I shall have him taken away in defiance of you, and at once. He *shall* live. And I have arranged it all."

Mrs. Lepell was a little confounded at this declaration and the new boldness with which it was made. She looked after her without being able to reply. "Take him away, will they," she thought, and smiled to herself. "She has not strength of character enough—hardly, I think."





CHAPTER XII.

COUNTERPLOT.

THE sick Miss Palmer meantime has been slowly recovering. Now she is sitting up, attended by the affectionate old landlady—now she is able to go out for a drive. The busy head of her mother was full of schemes. She was thinking of the young gentleman of fortune and position who had been introduced at that fatal St. Ryder party, and who had manifestly been struck by Miss Palmer's charms. The young gentleman had called several times, and the kind landlady, opening the door to him in person, had traced in his features and the tone of his inquiries, all the gradations of tender interest and hopeless attachment. Young Mr. Orrell was indeed much struck, and, as Mrs. Palmer had ascertained, was wholly and splendidly *sui juris*; could walk in any direction without check from guardian, Lord Chancellor, or *mother*—a class of person that Mrs. Palmer always wished had no relation to young men of fortune. By-and-by she saw this youth herself in the drawing-room—took him in hand, as it were—brought him friendly messages from the patient which her own prompt imagination furnished her with; and in short had everything in train to hand her child over to this admirer on her earliest recovery. Who are the foolish men who chatter about the inferiority of "the other sex," when we see these busy clever women about us, in crowds, married to those splendid and

superior Lords of the Creation (as the Lords themselves call each other in compliment)? How clever—how far-seeing—how full of tact! Never failing, never tiring, and never selfish. Let us run over that pile of cards together, and, taking stock of all our friends, say where lies the balance of cleverness—with the husbands or the wives? Is it with simpering, fatuous Smirkington, who talks fluently at a dinner, and thinks he should be in office somewhere, but whom the most barefaced compliment will turn into a child? or with that lady whom he has made Mrs. Smirkington, and who “could buy and sell him;” and who, without forwardness—but by her own simple diplomacy—has handsomely established her three portionless daughters? The niceties involved in that operation—the skill, the diplomacy, of that quiet, unselfish lady—certainly exceed all the delicate manoeuvrings of the great *Taganrog Treaty* of which we have heard, and for which Lord *Gingerly* got his *Peerage*. In fine, to narrow the issue, will Smirkington and his brethren ever do so much for their sons as Mrs. Smirkington and her sisters have done for their daughters?

But Miss Palmer was not co-operating—often a gratuitous difficulty with these poor labourers. Indeed, her mother had hardly taken her into confidence. The daughter was indeed thinking of two things—was pining to be well, and to do away with that one fatal, false step. Her friend came to her very often, and was not idle. But, as we have seen, her exertions had not been attended with serious profit. Helen came very often, and sat by her bedside; and the two interchanged their sorrows, and laid their little plans. Need it be said that both concurred, as taking pretty nearly the same view of the heroine of this narrative?

Helen had flown to her in her later trouble when she had noted the strange change in Doctor Cameron. She had poured out all her sorrows, hopes, and fears into that sympathising heart. But to Miss Palmer this apparent defection of the stern Doctor had struck something like terror.

“Do you not see?” she said, starting up. “I know

what she intends. Your poor, poor father, he is ill and failing, and she hopes, and means to, afterwards——”

“What?” said the other, looking at her aghast. “Not *that* surely!”

“I know it. I am sure of it,” said her friend excitedly. “She will stop at nothing—she will do anything to forward this plan. Oh, that I were well! But I am here helpless.”

“And I am helpless too,” said Helen; “and I have no friends to help me. Mr. Severne is——” She was going to say “infatuated,” but a look at the other’s face checked her in time.

“No; we have no friend,” repeated the other.

Suddenly Miss Palmer clasped her hands. “I know now! There is a friend. You remember that rough, good fellow. He was at Digby, and was very kind to me. There is goodness in his eyes. What is his name? —oh!——”

“Selby,” said Helen.

“Ah! but he *cannot* be a friend. He is for *her*.”

“Nothing of the kind,” said the other eagerly. “Try him. I am confident of him. You know him; he has been always in the country. I do not know when he will be back.”

“Try, try,” said the other; “we must try everything. I tell you there is no time to be lost—now that grim Doctor has gone over to her. Oh, that fatal night! If I had not listened to my own foolish pride and sense of dignity, this would not have happened. I have deserved it all, and *she* cleverly turned it to *her* profit. Yes, go to Mr. Selby: assure him I never got that letter. He has influence with Severne. He will believe *him*, though he will not mind *us*. What a night!” she went on in a reverie; “how little I dreamed that so much was depending on it. I should have known that I was no match for *her* strength. She had planned it all before. But how did she learn it—the news of Severne’s trouble? That always has puzzled me.”

“Oh, she heard it in the room; and besides, got a letter *from*—yes, from this very Mr. Selby.”

"He wrote it to her. Why?"

"Yes. She said so: we were in the hall, and a man in a white coat came in and gave it to her."

The other looked at her a moment, then clasped her hands, and cried out—

"My letter! The letter he wrote to me! I know it. It *is*. Dear child, you must go to Mr. Selby. This will clear all up. I see it now! Mine and yours too. It will help us all. Run to him: lose not a moment! Everything depends on this."

Mr. Selby had actually returned some two or three nights before; and on the morning that Mrs. Lepell met her step-daughter on the stairs was sitting in his bachelor lodging reading his letters and newspapers, when his servant came to tell him there "was a young lady in a cab at the door." A most shocking and improper act on "the young girl's part:" one to be condemned, too, by every young person brought up in strict principles of religion and decorum. Yet surely we, who know something of what was going forward in that unhappy home, may well pardon this venal infraction of the laws of Holy Society. And Selby, also decently brought up, what should *he* have done according to the same constitution? He went, however, to the door, and recognised Miss Lepell at once.

She would not come in at first; but at last was persuaded. He was puzzled as to what could be her mission. But without preface she went at once into her story—her griefs—her misapprehensions—her miseries. She had no friend—no one to advise her—all were against them in *that* house; and therefore she took this strange proceeding. He knew Mr. Severne. He was *his* friend. Mr. Severne was prejudiced against her.

"My dear young lady," he said, much mystified, "what is all this coming to? What do you want me to do for you?"

A little confused, she continued her story, and then asked him had he written a letter to Mrs. Lepell on that night telling of Severne's trouble.

"Not I," he said, "I was away in the country, I am sorry to say."

"Then you must do this," she said: "tell *him* that his letter never reached Miss Palmer—that I saw Mrs. Lepell receive it myself in the hall, and take it from the messenger, who wore a white coat. I did indeed; and she is quite innocent."

More in detail she explained all this to Selby, who was a "good fellow" as described by Miss Palmer, and entered into the young girl's sorrows most heartily, though his own inclinations were with the lady who was the unconscious object of all these proceedings. His face grew troubled as he listened, and he was a little curious at the same time. "I tell you what," he said, "this may be a mistake all the time. But there is no harm looking into it. I'll find out our friend in the white coat, and make out to whom he gave the letter. Meantime, Miss Helen, you say nothing about it, and I'll speak to Severne. We dine to-day at Sir Duncan Dennison's."

He was a little disturbed. He had been a great believer in Mrs. Lepell, but latterly had met with neglect from that lady. He was in the humour for curiosity and suspicion. There were some tangled nets gathering about the feet of Mrs. Lepell. She could not think of *everything*. This little foolish matter might yet turn out awkwardly.





CHAPTER XIII.

DINNER AT SIR DUNCAN'S.

THIS was the evening of the great Physician's feast. He was a cheery, good-natured man, that enjoyed the world, though "well on," as it is called. That old phrase of "too old" for that and "too old" for this, or of "in my young days I liked *that*," are now happily worn out; for the old now happily keep up stride by stride with the young—are not left up in the window while the gay procession goes by below. All honour to the jocund veteran who pays life the compliment of keeping up with it in good heart, good spirits, good lively ideas, and good clothes of the cut of the day, until the fatal knock is heard below.

Sir Duncan's cheerful little meals were liked. He had good company: not your official men of wit, or professional soul of "capital things;" but your "pleasant" people, who are cheerful without being boisterous, who have no cut-and-dried "stories;" but can tell something that is "amusing" or interesting.

On this day came a husband and wife who were not only conventionally supposed to "get on" well together (there are many who would infinitely prefer being asked out separately, but the rigorous laws of the dinner party require their joint attendance), but who really liked each other, and did not ignore each other before company, as is pretty often the case. They were Mr. and Mrs. Adams—tolerably young—and Mrs. Adams was hand-

some enough to be an ornament to the table. Mr. Selby was there also ; Mr. Severne and Doctor Cameron. That Physician's colour came into his pale face as he saw the other, in great spirits and exultation, talking at the fire-place. But Severne was seen himself to go up to him, greeted him soberly, and said—"I am so glad you have come, Doctor Cameron. We shall have a very pleasant little party, and I should not have wished you to have missed it." A curious light was in the Doctor's eyes. He had a feeling of superiority—*of pity almost*—for the other. The words she had said came back on him like sweet music: that it was *intellect and the strong mind* that could control *her*. There—the door opened. She comes.

He was proud of her—poor infatuated man—as she entered. She never certainly had appeared so brilliant—so retiring, so modest, so elegant—even in earlier days. Her dress was even rich, and in the best taste. Who would not be nervous coming by herself? "Forward," "odd," some of Mrs. Adams' precise friends would have said—not thinking that Sir Duncan's was an exceptional place. He had long since got out of the jurisdiction. A young girl might go herself to that house. "Sir Duncan will *chaperon* you," the mamma said. Wonderful eyes; wonderful hair; wonderful colour on her cheeks. No one *before* had ever dreamed these elements could flash out so brilliantly! but the events of these later days—the excitement, the uncertainty of what even that night might bring forth—could well account for this change. Sir Duncan welcomed her gallantly. He liked a lady, he said, that had "go" in her; and had told Mr. Adams her little story. "A poor broken husband at home, won't last any time; been ill this long time—not that I say she is quite a night nurse." And he looked knowingly. She put her hand into Doctor Cameron's with an air of trust and confidence that the other seemed to understand. She half-whispered to him—"Such a scene as I had to go through to get away." Her eyes added, "Heaven help poor me!"

"Severne, my friend," said Sir Duncan, "you are not

as lively to-night as usual. A lucky fellow like you has no business to be out of spirits."

Severne walked over without answering, and sat down beside Mrs. Lepell. "We have had such news to-day. That poor lady—the widow you know—is very ill indeed, and has written over wishing to see his Lordship. A little unreasonable, I think; a man at his time of life is surely exempt from such requests. I shall have to go too."

She started. "Go!" she said; "and when?"

"Oh, in two or three days, I suppose. I cannot *bear* the notion."

Really, a man of that time of life, and with his infirmities— She was really disturbed. The grand current that had been hurrying forward so triumphantly was checked. And then she asked "For how long?"

"Oh, who can tell!" he said impatiently. "It upsets everything. A foolish woman's whim! Who knows how long? Months, or a year perhaps. I am, of course, bound to him. He expects this attendance, just as everything was getting smooth. I had plans for you."

"For *me*?" she repeated in a low voice.

"Yes, for you. I had laid them all out myself. I assure you I amuse myself thinking of what I will do for you. I suppose you could not be persuaded what a deep interest I feel in you and your position. Something has always told me that our destinies are not to be separate."

"And I believe in that too," she said ardently.

"You don't believe in dinner?" said Sir Duncan cheerfully. "Here is my arm being offered for some seconds. Come, let us lead the way."

It was an inspiring little feast at a good-sized round table; flowers, lights, elegant china, good wines and exquisite dishes. (Had not Lord Northfleet tried to steal away the Doctor's cook?—a shabby trick!) Sir Duncan himself did not disdain to give a friendly hint. When there was something of special merit on its travels around, who can have sympathy with the narrow-hearted precisians, the dinner martinets, who think it bad taste or bad manners to know anything of what they set before

us? A larger-hearted policy has begun to obtain. These are ghouls. There are those of rank who have applied to the Fish twice. They do not know this.

Doctor Cameron was next to Mrs. Lepell, by an accident. He was, indeed, avoiding the place; but as he hung undecided, it became the only one open. Perhaps he was aggrieved already by that confidence before dinner. But she whispered him presently—"You saw Mr. Severne was whispering me before dinner. It is a secret, mind; and he must not know that I have told you: so keep your eyes fixed upon your plate. He is going away."

This news was so unexpected—perhaps so welcome—that he had almost forgotten his caution, and repeated aloud "Going away!"

"Yes," said she, softly. "He is going away for a long time to the Continent. Are you sorry? Yes—no?"

She read joy in his eyes. "But," he said eagerly, "you are sorry."

"You would not think it the truth, if I told you what I really think. I will confess this much: it may prove a *sort of relief* to me—an absence of a *kind of restraint*, for *I do* feel—a—sort of gratitude, you know; but still—"

What could that Doctor make out of these words? Whatever he drew from them, they were more exhilarating than the champagne that he was now pouring into his glass.

"Yes," he said, with sparkling eyes, "I can understand—perfectly."

"Now," said she, confidentially, "we shall say no more. Will you do one thing for me? Talk to *them*—show them the empire of that brain, as a favour to me. I shall take pride in your success—you know I shall."

There seems to be a kind of social Fate who looks after little openings, chances, &c., almost too trifling to be referred to any less-important dispensation. And this deity is perverse and malignant, and sometimes kindly and generous. It put it into Sir Duncan's head, precisely at this moment, to ask a question of Dr. Cameron.

"You were out there, you know, and were a careful observer. *Do* the natives there eat their prisoners?"

Here was the opening. What man, stimulated by such encouragement as he had received, would not have shone? With great information and a good deal of humour, he told what he had seen. His neighbour was perhaps his most reverential listener. The dinner was very pleasant. We should have heard Mr. Adams next day at another dinner quoting him "as an exceedingly acute, dry, and pleasant Scotch physician, who was just come from those parts cold as," &c.

When the ladies were gone, Selby drew over his chair next to Severne, and began to whisper to him eagerly.

We know what the subject of that talk was. But Selby had been busily at work all day.

"I am sorry to tell you, Severne, it has turned out just as the young girl said. I am afraid she is full of little schemes, to speak mildly. With great trouble I made out the fellow in the white coat, and he described the woman to whom he gave your letter—or, rather, who took it from him—to a T. It was not Mrs. Palmer; for he could take his oath, he said, it wasn't an old girl nor a young girl; and then went into a perfect *carte de visite* of our friend up stairs. These fellows have observation, you know, and keep their eyes about them——"

"I dare say," said Severne, moodily. He had been displeased with her behaviour during the dinner. "Nothing more likely. I suppose she thinks, as I am going away, nothing more is to be got. Yes, I suppose she is a schemer like them all."

"Well, you see, you have done injustice to that poor girl, who has suffered for it."

"Yes, yes," said Severne, hastily, "and I am sorry for it. Still, she stood by me that night, gallantly. I must be grateful——"

"Miss Palmer?"

"No, no; the other. Her coming off and paying her little money that she had scraped and saved."

"Well," said Selby, hesitating, "I must tell you about

that also. But I thought she had told you. That was a joint plot of ours—I mean the money.”

“What, yours, my dear Selby? How kind of you. But she—I *forced her to take it* again—sent it to her in a week.”

They both sat looking at each other.

“Severne, send on the wine, will you? Try that claret—clart. As an Irish gentleman said, All the good drinks, you know, are in one syllable—Port, Sher’, Clar’t, and Spurts.”

Severne passed on the wine mechanically.

“But it was to be a secret; and you have only just come back. She has not had time to tell you.”

“That may be the reason,” he said. “Give her every chance.”

“I tell you *I’ll try her to-night*. But still, it was an odd thing. Ah! I begin to be afraid. We’ll see what she will say.”

Severne remained moody and *distract*—was even impatient.

“Having to go away, too, in this way. I like to see everything out. Do you know, I see something in that woman that is to me different from everything else. *Her face, figure, manner, speech, look, and mind, taken separately, are all pretty much of the ordinary run*; but, Selby, there is a *general air* about her—a look that she puts on at times—that haunts me, and which I cannot put out of my head.”

This was indeed something of the secret of our heroine’s success; and some of us must have met in our lives a stray person whose charm was this indescribable bloom, as it may be called.

“But she is married,” said Selby gravely, and looking at his plate.

“How absurd!” said Severne, impatiently. “Who is talking of that?”

Sir Duncan did not relish this confidential talk and illiberal subscription to the common stock, which, indeed, any professor of manners and ceremonies must condemn as unfair to the host and his company. They presently

went up; Severne in a very disturbed state of mind indeed. Mrs. Lepell was with the ladies, scarcely holding her own. Indeed, her sex, injured by outrage and by open preference, and rejection as open, can revenge itself on an enemy blessed with more attractions. But with the rising in the horizon of other black bodies, all is set right, and there is the handsomest indemnification.

She saw the trouble on Severne's face. What must she have set it down to but to the annoyance and grief at his own departure? Had she been wiser, and thought of Selby—but the curious flurry of that night upset more than the wits of one. How was she to know? There was he, now beside her, speaking softly with his musical voice, and listening with worship, as she fancied, to her. Was he not talking of eternal obligations—of that night, the thought of which had for him always a curious fascination?

"*And your bringing me your little store?*" he said very earnestly, looking into her face. "*Your own little hoard?*" Without intending it, he leant on the word "*own.*" "Gathered, I suppose, for something—for the house—was it not? And there was besides the uncertainty—or rather the *certainty*—that I would never repay you."

She looked down. Not a suspicion crossed her. It was evidence of fast devotion—of chains. If she had only looked at his eager face she might have seen his doubting look, and the work of that and the next night have been prevented. But she answered: "Had it been double, you were welcome to it."

"Some little store for the house—furniture—dress—what not? I *know* it was; and this I ran the chance of robbing you of. And your husband, he must have known—there was the risk *there.*"

"I should not have minded *that*," she said calmly. "It can be laid out still."

It did indeed seem to her a blissful night: she always liked this hero of ours—his nature, his frankness, and his devotion to her were very pleasing. The party was now breaking up. Sir Duncan was not very well pleased

with some of his guests ; and it had not been as agreeable and lively as usual. But then, when had the guests been so absorbed with matter of such dramatic interest ? Going down, she said to Severne, who was still uncertain—

“I shall wait at home for you all to-morrow. Time—that sweet interval—will slip away only too fast ; and after you are gone——”

Her tone was inexpressibly melancholy. Beyond was Doctor Cameron, watching. But he, too, was elated. His rival was going away. As she went out, she ran over and whispered : “Won’t you come and see your patient to-night ? *Do.*” Then Severne put her into her hired carriage. For a moment she looked out, and saw him standing in the light in the doorway, with that curious look of doubt and despondency ; then he turned away slowly. For long after, that vision came back upon her—dramatic—pleasant to think on. *For it was the last time she ever saw him.* And even this night was to bring about strange changes.





CHAPTER XIV.

STRUGGLE AND VICTORY.

BUT her feeling was one of triumph and victory. She threw herself back in delight. "Everything falls out as I want it: even what seems to oppose me. This going away is the best thing: why, he is ready at this moment to run away with me, if I proposed it."

And the other grand schemes came pouring on her brain. The time was short. There was need of resolution and promptitude. Once *he* was gone away, she saw *this* clearly—that all was at an end. Time and distance are woman's greatest enemies. Before the carriage stopped she had all ready in her mind. She got out and went into the parlour, taking her lamp in. It was no more than ten o'clock. She stood at the table waiting. Just as she had a foreboding in the dark carriage, the old trial was waiting her. There was no light in the hall; but above, over the banisters, there was a flickering light. It came jerking down, and a figure that was like a ghoul, or one raised from the grave, stood before her. A common night-light, dim and flaring, and that showed a figure—oh, so thin and miserable—faint eyes, worn cheeks, and the presence of death itself. Can we not fancy that incoherent torrent of reproach and self-bewailment? She was killing—all were killing him. It only wanted a little more. She was cruel, false, wicked, shameless! Cursed be the day that he had met her. She had brought ruin, desolation, wreck with her. Cursed, again, be the day

that he had met her ! She was an evil demon. She had *betrayed him*, and *for hereafter* : there was to be no rest for him here or hereafter. Oh, such happiness ! To have bartered away a pleasant home and his darlings who loved him—and for whom ? He would have given her his heart's blood, but now she had destroyed him for ever and ever. There was no hope, no mercy, here nor hereafter. The demons were waiting for him, and an endless eternity of expiation. Nor could he rest even here. He had no sleep—no repose. They denied him even that. No—he was *lost—lost !* And he deserved it.

There were other listeners to this shocking burst. His miserable daughter had stolen down behind, and with her hand on his arm, was piteously imploring him to go up. The servants were beyond in the hall, listening awe-stricken in the dark, as the quivering utterances rose through the house. Awful and spectral night, to be told of hereafter in many a service. Now one of them ran softly to open the door, for they had heard a ring. It was Doctor Cameron.

As he entered, the other turned his frantic eyes upon him with a cry. “Ah, you have come ! You are with the rest—you are in the league. She has brought you round like the rest ! Look at him, dressed out for their parties ! It is he who has pronounced my sentence. He has brought all this on me, and will not let me rest ; he will not let me sleep, though he has the power to do. Will no one take pity on me ? Will no one befriend me ? *You* have no strength, my poor child ; and you will want help yourself very *very* soon.”

They at last got him away. The Doctor and Mrs. Lepell were standing looking at each other. As the door closed, Patty looked after them distrustfully. She was not one to listen at the door, or she would have heard a strange and hurried interview : strange and eager whisperings of more serious things than had ever been discussed in that parlour, though it *had* been a lawyer's once.

She began at once : “Heaven help me ! How long are we to have these scenes ? Dearest Doctor Cameron,

you are my friend. You like me, I know, and would do much for me. Help me—advise me—give me your aid and strength ; for I now see that you are the only one to whom I have to look.”

“ You know,” he answered, “ what I would do for you—that my heart, and strength, and brain are all at your service.”

“ It is not that,” she said, agitated, and leaning against the chimney-piece. “ I want you to aid me—to stand between me and temptation—to *save* me, as you alone can. If you pray, pray for me.”

He smiled bitterly. “ Once,” he said, “ I might have done much in *that* way. What is this coming to ? ”

She came up to him and dropped her voice into a whisper : “ I told you what he said, though it was a secret. He is going away. He cannot bear the thought of it, for he likes me—shall I tell you plainly—*loves* me.”

“ I thought so,” he said, fiercely. “ I have eyes. You have only found this out now ? ”

“ That is not my fault,” she said, hurriedly. “ Does it follow that I love him ? But what if he has gone further ? You saw him to-night—his trouble—his silence—his confusion. Do you know what that meant ? All that journey was heavy on his mind ; and at the end, before we went away, what if he had proposed to me *to go with him* ? ”

Both stood looking at each other for some moments. Neither spoke. “ I see it on your lips,” she said. “ You are thinking ‘ she will go.’ Ah, you little know me. Though, indeed, *after to-night*, and these horrible scenes, who could blame a poor helpless woman for seeking any release ? I ask you, is it to go on ? ” she went on excitedly. “ Am I to be branded in this city as something disgraceful and degraded ? Am I to be worn into the grave with these mad and savage attacks ? I tell you, Doctor Cameron, I can stand it no longer. I *will* not endure it. I leave this house. I have made up my mind. It is a hell to me. It is wearing my life away. And, Doctor Cameron, I tell you plainly, *I am driven to accept any shape of release—I care not what it is !* ”

He almost gasped out : " But you will not go—surely not. You do not mean——"

She put out her hand to him, with a smile which was "almost seraphic." "No—no—no. I would rather suffer to the end. But that is what I came to you for. *They* would drive me to leave him ; but *that* shall never happen. *You* must find some way of release. You know—need I tell your heart where my regard is? You must have guessed it long, and seen what I tried hard to conceal."

"Gracious Heaven!" he said, with almost a groan. "What is all this?"

"Yes," she said. "I feel there is some happiness left—some to come for me. Surely I was not born expressly to be wretched! Is there not some indulgence for a poor, hunted, persecuted woman? I know—I feel there is. No! no! Be at rest on that. I shall die before I do what he wishes me to do. But still, what is to become of me? If I stay and if I suffer, *I stay and suffer for you.*"

He stood looking at her a little wildly—his breath came and went—but he could not answer.

"Find some way. If you care for me, you will. *He* is ready to give up all for me. You, if you really liked me, could do no less. Even, if you chose, you could save me from this cruel degradation before a whole household. You could keep this man, who has some morbid hatred against me, tranquil and quiet. Let him have his way, if he wishes it. Let him sleep if he will ; it would seem to me the more charitable course. The end cannot be far off. We have done what we could, and tried to save him and soften his suffering. But we cannot give him life—that worthless, wicked life which he used only to destroy the life and peace of others. Oh, save me—save me! Help me, dear Cameron. You are the only one friend left to me on earth."

Her head sank down—she seemed about to fall. But he remained in a sort of stupor, passing his hand across his forehead.

"Think it over," she said, with a soft imploring voice,

"You will devise something. Time is flying by, telegrams may come, and they will have to go at once. I shall come again. Never fear, and never doubt *me!*"

She was gone. Her voice long remained ringing like music in his ear; his brain was in a whirl. "It is true what he said, that there are demons beside us, hurrying us away to eternal ruin. I feel them—I hear them now——"

There was no demon beside him then. But a soft face was looking down on him, full of pity and sympathy.

"Dear Doctor Cameron," she said—it was the voice of Helen—"you must not mind; papa spoke a little unkindly. But you know the state he is in. I know you perfectly and thoroughly, and how good and true you are, and how you wish to do what is right, but are beset with these cruel difficulties and temptations. I know what has been going on all this time, and what snares have been laid for you which no one could resist, but which I have tried to aid you in resisting.

"You!" he said. "How? Snares, indeed! Ah! but you know not how I have fallen, how I have listened, or how little all my pretence of goodness has aided——"

"Yes it has," she went on, "I have seen it, and I have prayed, oh! prayed so for you and for our miserable selves, who want aid so much more. And I think our prayers have been heard, or will be heard. Who would not listen to the prayers of a weak, unhappy, desolate child, whose father is wasting slowly out of the world, and about whom misery and misfortune are fast gathering, and whose only hope for herself is to die speedily? Surely God will grant that prayer. Oh, dear Doctor Cameron, pray, pray with me for strength and aid! And you will not add to our miseries yet more by turning against us at the end."

He turned and saw her on her knees, with her hands up in prayer, and her lips moving, and her cheeks, from which watching and almost privation had removed the bloom. There was something so piteous and touching in the sight that he ran to her and raised her.

"God will assist you, and I *feel* He will stand by *me*, who need it so much. Oh pray, *pray* for me," he added, with passionate entreaty, "and He will give me strength."

"You are true and good," she cried out with exultation, "as I always said you were. But you must do more; you must leave us—fly from this place."

He started—he recollected. "No—yes—it is the only safety."

"Dr. Pinkerton was here this evening for you, and left this note. He says you must decide to-morrow. The ship is actually in waiting at Gravesend. It seems a providence—a special opening—and you will be your old self again."

"It is—it is," he cried. "But it is more a providence sending such an angel to me. Listen. I obey. Oh, you have saved me, dear; for on this very night I should have fallen, and perhaps done such a—nay, a few minutes later——"

"*What would have happened a few minutes later, Doctor Cameron?*" said a voice behind, stern and cold. A figure was standing at the door: a face contemptuous and scornful was looking down on them. "Doctor Cameron," it said, "what have you decided; or have you forgotten all that passed only a few minutes ago?"

But the young girl was on her feet in a moment, and standing between Doctor Cameron and the other. She indeed seemed a guardian angel.

"No," she said, eagerly, "you have no power over him now. He is free. He is going away—he is saved. Oh do not listen to her," she said, imploringly. "I know you will not. Pray—pray."

Only for a second he was irresolute, only from surprise. He began to move calmly to the door.

"Pray! pray!" repeated Mrs. Lepell, with something like a scoff. "We might think this the prison scene in 'Faust.' What, changed again! Take care you do not change once more! Only bear this in mind, I have neither time nor patience for such vacillation."

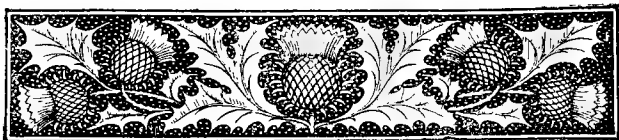
He still moved—he was at the door.

"Going," she said, bitterly; "a precious ally, indeed

—so soft, with all his sense. He will accept any story they tell him ! Mind, there is no going back after this. Don't dare to come to me."

The colour came into his face at her taunts, but he could not answer. The young girl looked on in an agony of suspense. He said nothing, and was gone—gone. Stray passers-by saw a man rush furiously from the house. The young girl looked at her step-mother with eyes of joy and thankfulness. The whole scene was not indeed unlike Faust and Marguerite. Who would be so ungallant, though, as to liken the heroine of this story to the dangerous person in the scarlet dress and cock's feather? and again, unlike that dramatic incident, Faust has been saved by the prayers of Margaret. Saved he was certainly ; for the next night the *Conway Castle* dropped down from Gravesend bearing emigrants, and among the officers of the ship was DOCTOR CAMERON.





CHAPTER XV

A PLAN.

BUT that night was not over yet. It was about eleven o'clock. The young girl had gone up with joy in her heart, and thinking there was some hope left in the world still. She listened at her father's door, and heard his mutterings. Then she stole in softly, and sat by him and soothed him, though she was very weary.

Any private speculator would have been confounded at the change in Mrs. Lepell, as she got to *her* room, and stood before the glass. She was in her finery ; but in spite of all the decorations, her face seemed actually contorted. Was she in a fury? "The fool! that I should have wasted time and labour on quite a fool." She flung herself into a chair, her opera cloak still on, and sat there beating her foot impatiently. This miserable weak Doctor had overthrown all her schemes. It was a pitiful desertion. It upset everything. Not indeed that "running away," the fiction with which she had credited Severne. That gentleman, vacillating as he was indeed, would have been the last to propose such a step : but the time, she had a presentiment, would be narrowed. He would be gone in a day, and, once gone, all was undone.

Any readers who have watched this character through the various passages of her life, as described in *Bella Donna*, in *Jenny Bell*, and in the present narrative, will understand that she was a person that, with all her

timidity, could be prompt and decisive when the moment for action arrived. Nay, that she was even as bold in planning suddenly as she was prompt in carrying out. Her face was still working with vexation, and contempt, and disappointment. For there are opportunities that will not recur. And there were dramatic scenery, background, footlights, &c., about that night's little piece which could not so readily be got together again. But a hundred little plans were drifting through her mind, and at last, just as the clock struck twelve, she started up suddenly, and, with her cloak still on, stole up stairs softly and on tiptoe.

She passed his door, and paused to listen. She heard his old broken complaints and mutterings sustained like a "keen;" and heard, too, the soft, never-wearied soothings of that patient daughter. She passed on; went up a floor higher to Helen's room. There her light was burning on the table. In a moment she was hastily searching the place. There was not much to search, for the patient girl had accepted any little amount of furnishing that the lady of the house had thought would do very well for her. Visitors were not received there as in the drawing-room, where the gentlemen were made welcome, and there was no need of show, &c. A plain chest of drawers, of rather humble wood, was the strong element, and of this she tried the drawers. They were open; so she knew that what she sought could not be there. The bed; yes! She turned down the pillow; and there, carefully secreted, she found what the faithful girl guarded so carefully. She seized on it—on them—in triumph, and stole down as she had gone up. She waited patiently in her own room, and could wait patiently. Time was less valuable now. It came to half-past twelve—three-quarters—one. Her foot still beat on the ground; the flowers and cloak were about her still. Her door was a little open, so that she could hear. At last it came. The young girl had done her filial vigils; and with her sigh, that her step-mother could hear, crept away up stairs for a night almost as miserable as that of her sick father. The patient lady, who had

waited so long, could now wait some time longer, to make all sure, then stole up quietly once more, and entered her husband's room.

The dim light was burning in a dish, making flashes and flares that threw ghastly shadows in spasms about the room. The unhappy Mr. Lepell was sitting up on his bed, swinging to and fro and groaning to himself. The wild eyes were turned on her more wildly ; and with the strained sleepless scars of long anguish. He stared at her with wonder, then shrank away, as if in terror, as she walked up to him.

He did not speak ; it did indeed seem to him a visit for some unholy purpose. She might have had a knife under that opera cloak.

"I am alone, helpless," he gasped ; "I shall call to them."

"Hush !" she said, calmly and softly. "What are you afraid of ? I saw the light burning, and heard a noise, and feared something might be on fire. See, I am going away ; try and go to sleep, and get rid of such dreams."

"Sleep !" he groaned ; "I shall never sleep again, until the long, long sleep comes again. You and he have taken care of *that*."

"I !" she said, stopping. "But of course ; always the way. Poor me, of course. Take your medicines. *Here, here, plenty I see*, and get rid of the nightmare." She took the lamp out of the dish, and brought it over to the large table, which was close to his bed ; then went out in the same tranquil way, closing the door softly. But she listened, went away, came back and listened again. After a while she heard him moving about again, and then a cry of what seemed joy—what she was waiting for, and then went away to her own room : where she lay awhile, and could not get to sleep, which provoked her a good deal, and made her out of humour ; for she wished everything to go smooth with her, and power of sleeping to be as much under her control as she fancied she had men's minds. So ended that strange and, it must be said, most dramatic night.



CHAPTER XVI.

FINAL REPULSE.

NOW it was morning again, and Patty came in to the faithful and affectionate daughter—dozing herself wearily—with news, good news, that the “blessed” sleep had come at last, as if it was a rainfall, and visited the long suffering master of the house. This intelligence brought joy to that young face. She dressed herself speedily, and hurried down. He was indeed “fast”—not breathing heavily—his face turned to the wall—all excellent symptoms of the more natural sleep. She only looked in wistfully from the door, from afar off, at her treasure, then softly went away. Strict charge through the house that there was to be no sound.

The gracious and restoring mantle had also wrapped itself round the fatigued frame of the lady of the house—though this was not until early in the morning. This blessing—hath it not its sweet degrees and qualities nicely graduated—showering itself down in abundant luxuriance on the child, who takes it as of course; and coming wearily and with pain to those who have waited at the sickbed, and to the mourners whose strained wrung eyes have sunk inwards from mere exhaustion.

Mrs. Lepell was not to be disturbed, but would have her long rest, perhaps, until towards noon.

But a Doctor's carriage was now at the door at nine o'clock. Doctor Pinkerton sprang out nimbly, and was

in the drawing-room in a moment. He saw the young girl. "My dear child, you are very young," he said, "and there is much on your little shoulders. But we must all look out and take what care we can. Here's Cameron been with me this morning after chasing me all through the town—to hospitals, and everywhere—and has told me all that took place last night. He is a noble fellow, and has gone down to his ship. And I tell you what, I wasn't easy till I came off here. That *woman is a dangerous* woman ; and cost what may, and in spite of all opposition, she shall not be left another night under this roof."

"Oh! I am *so* glad," she said, clasping her hands. "What I have been praying for. A country spot, green fields, trees—*that* will cure all—and we may be happy again."

"To be sure, you poor little watcher—my heart bleeds for you, so it does ;—and will put colour into those cheeks again ; and as for the money and creditors, leave all that to me. The house or cottage is ready in fact. Now I must see him. Never mind about waking him. He may sleep too much. This is the best symptom as yet—a pure natural sleep—without any of Dennison's quack Italian drugs, which, between you and me, I never did approve of. Bring them down, and the first thing we'll do will be to throw 'em out of the window."

The young girl flew up. "And I'll see about papa too," she said. "I *think* we had better not wake him."

"Poor, faithful child," said he, as she went out. "I wish I had such a daughter !"

In a moment she had met him on the stairs, scared and terrified. "They are gone," she said. "There is only one left. There were three !"

The Doctor looked at her in silence ; then strode up, burst into the sick man's room ; and taking him by the shoulders, had turned him over in a moment. In another moment his ear was at his heart. The two little bottles were on the large table, empty—next to his night-light, which had burnt out. "Possibly too late," he muttered.

The young girl behind him caught only the last word, and sank down with a loud cry.

* * * *

It is scarcely worth while going more into these wretched details. Desperate remedies were applied as desperately. There was wild rushing and hurrying. The sound of feet indeed roused the lady, who was sleeping late, and who came down wondering at the confusion. Desperate remedies had their effect; and towards the close of the day there were signs of life—a mere flicker. The deadly Italian potion, one of Sir Duncan's "hobbies," which later brought him into disrepute, and into one very awkward mess, had not indeed killed, but seemed to have sunk into the brain and brought on a sort of insensibility that appeared like idiocy.

But the question was—how had the unfortunate gentleman got at these fatal drugs? From Sir Duncan the story came, in his own self-defence—that it was the rash stupidity of the family, who had been charged to keep them under lock and key, and by whose carelessness the wretched man had got at them himself. Who was so excited about it at first as the gentleman's wife, and who so loud on the culpability of her step-daughter—openly accusing her that day before the house of not having the firmness, through her foolish affection for her father, to resist his cravings for this drug? She had heard her moving about ever so late.

The young girl listened, amazed, half wild with suspense and grief, and burst out: "It was *she*—Oh it was! I know it. She was always plotting his death!"

Luckily there was only the Doctor present. HE knew the truth. But who could prove it? The wretched man himself could not speak—and from that hour never did speak—being in a sort of heavy stupefaction that was next to idiocy. Who, she might say, as indeed she did, should dare to expose her, save indeed that Doctor Pinkerton, who, it was notorious, always disliked, and had been turned out of the house by, her? She had Sir

Duncan's good word also, who protested she was as fine a woman as he had at his little dinners, and was greatly grieved when he heard of her being driven out of her house.

Severne never came all through that weary day, though she wrote notes to him, which were received when Mr. Selby was with him, telling him very grave particulars; and just as Mrs. Lepell had anticipated in the morning, came a telegram pressing instant departure, as the poor lady was all but *in extremis*. She had, therefore, no aid to rely on but her own; and, as anyone who is at all up in events that affect the fashionable world well knows, the arrival of the present Lord Severne and his young relation, Harold Severne, Esquire, at Marseilles, was only too soon followed by the death of the lady, with that of her possible heir: an event which of course placed distinguished families in mourning, and removed the only probable obstacle between Harold Severne, Esquire, and the title.

Mrs. Lepell, therefore, had now no aid to rely on but her own self. She was scarcely a match for Doctor Pinkerton or the faithful daughter Helen: who no sooner saw her, during this and later days, than she would fall into a strange fit—half mysterious, half-sober—and with cries and sobs denounce her as *her father's murderess*—in short, it was such a series of the most painful, “awkward,” the world would say, scenes, that she seemed wise in withdrawing and giving up the battle. Decency, surely, before interest, or even comfort. She might have made terms, but that Doctor Pinkerton—always her pitiless enemy, and who had the administration of money affairs, &c. sternly refused to treat with her in *any way*, as if he had some control or power over her; and it was known that she had but a small pittance indeed allowed her.

Much more reasonably might she complain of the conduct of Lord John Raby, who, from the friendly and intimate terms he was on with the lady, might have been expected to arrange matters for her. But when she wrote to him, and did not receive an answer, and then waited on him and was not received, *though she knew he was at*

home, Lord John grew almost excited. "I won't let that woman in! Don't let her near the house!" he cried. He shrank from an *esclandre* as from an east wind, and had a morbid horror of his name "being dragged into any fuss or confusion of that sort," as he said himself very candidly and openly. "I like people that go on in the regular way like everyone else;" and from people decaying in purse or character he shrank as from an infection. "At that supper," he said, "which little Perlet gave us in the year—no matter—where the police burst in, and I got away by saying I was an Englishman—egad, the only thing my country ever did for me—and I had to give them something else besides my name—— But, Sir, as I was saying, I never saw my gold snuff-box from that night, though I knew that creature Perlet had it. But I was so afraid of getting mixed up in their infernal dirty questionings and suspicions, that I was content to go without it." Indeed, Lord John was rather hard on our heroine, and seemed to be aggrieved or outraged personally. "I always knew what she was. I always said she was——" and his Lordship dropped his voice and made a face. But it was, however, at this time that he was dragged into concluding those negotiations which ended in his leading to the altar the well-known rich widow, Mrs. Laxey.

Though she was left without friends, and had to go forth on her weary travels, she left behind her a dismal house of horrors: for "though all that medical skill could do"—as the phrase goes—was done for the unhappy owner, he never rose out of that state of dull insensibility, and did not even recognise the faithful saint of a daughter who had so long waited on him. She had to carry on another battle, for their affairs had fallen into disorder, and debtors and obligations had arisen; and when things were settled there was but a small income to support them. Idiocy alone—but idiocy and poverty combined—is a miserable combination.

For years this went on, when there came at last what was called "a happy release," and Mr. Lepell took away with him from this world that long account of weakness

and folly—gentle names, always invented to cover what is in reality the strength of selfishness and the worldly wisdom of self-will. For her it was a release too ; and it may be said that the patient watcher of late enjoyed some happy years : for there was one looking on who had long admired her sweetness and virtues. This was Mr. Selby.

Mr. Severne remained away a long time with his noble relation — coming home now and again to arrange business matters. It was well known where he was and where he had been, for the world now took a surprising interest in his movements, and hotel-keepers found out there were numbers who were delighted to know of his arrival at Starridge's in Bond Street, and accordingly *affichéé* "Harold Severne, Esquire, and suite," as "sojourning" there. One matter that took up his thoughts was the arrangement of the Digby property—a matter which had now become a little troublesome. The propounding of that newly-found will, which had before seemed simple enough, now became suddenly embarrassing, by the change in our Mrs. Lepell's status and condition—in fact, the *esclandre*, as Lord John would say of that unlucky night.*

* The legal reader will see this in a moment. Counsel's opinion was taken on the matter, and Mr. Colter, Q.C. (what practitioner has not consulted Colter on Bottomry?) advised "arrangement." "Though Lord Mansfield, an eminent judge, has laid it down," Colter wrote, "that such a will was established of itself, by the destruction of the latter document, and that such was the doctrine of the Common law ; still the tendency of later decisions was to throw the onus on the parties seeking to establish the will ; and, besides an actual existence of the document, to require proof of surrounding circumstances and evidence of *intention to revive* the old instrument." On such a construction the only witness that could have been put forward was our heroine: and as she would have had to suffer cross-examination at the hands of the terrible Serjeant Ryder, the reader will see how nice the question was. The Delegates soon after decided Swabey's case, and Colter's view would seem now to be established,



CHAPTER XVII.

EPILOGUE.

THUS far we have attended the career of the lady, the leading incidents of whose life have been given in the present and two preceding narratives. In that life of hers, not destined to be a very long one, she had played some three or four games, as the phrase goes, of large interest, and on the whole played them unsuccessfully. Without once more affirming that Honesty is, &c., it may be said that the old humdrum course of decency, and perhaps stupidity, is the most profitable in the end: and that the dashing people who start from nothing, with their lively wits for capital—men who by sheer boldness make a desperate leap into Parliament, climb on bank arm-chairs, drive carriages, and eat and give splendid dinners—have but poor enjoyment for their pains, and have no relish for the fine wines and rich meats. The thing somehow ends badly. So with the heroine of these stories, who, at the end of all, was in very poor condition, and in sore straits indeed.

This, I say, was her last venture of any serious character. And though she did not want heart or daring, or what Lord John would have called “game,” yet the labour and disadvantages were now doubled. She had gone down, as it were, to a lower floor, and began again there. Somehow, too, what with the tribe of Lord Johns and their loud speech at clubs—what, too, with people who had known her at earlier stages, turning up fitfully, or

coming to stay in town—her history was beginning to be known. She was marked, as it were. She was willing indeed to begin again and labour for her crust—even to take her bench and oar in the governesses' galley—but it seemed next to impossible. A married lady in that office was an objection: she could hardly be ranked as “a young person.” Indeed, all the respectable ladies' professions seemed closed to her. But she most regretted that of the directress of young ladies' education—a *carrière* which, like the Bar, leads to anything—to gentility, wealth, and rank. She met with sad rebuffs, too, in her laudable efforts to secure work. Cold looks, suspicions, were the least. It was like the unhappy gentleman in the well-known play, whom a series of awkward accidents had forced into the position of a criminal, who, when he received his honourable discharge with the proper card, could obtain no honourable employment. With persons of the class of our heroine, who have no established circle in which they can live steadily from tender years till they grow old, it is naturally too hard to trace anything consecutive of their career. If we look round among our friends, we shall find that all who answer to this description have for us a fitful irregular existence. Are they not now dead, now alive? are they not lost to sight for years? do they not “turn up” for a short space only to be again lost to view? This man could be found, and could tell a scrap of their history afar off in that hot country; another has an experience of them in that distant cold one; we ourselves can supply something. But each knows but a fragment, and who shall bring the possessors of such fragments together? So it must be with our Mrs. Lepell—*née* Jane Bell—in whose life, as just mentioned, this closing business was the last serious venture. At most, but three or four glimpses of her life can be picked up.

Here is one which came through Mr. Canby. When the gallant Duke's Own (the Du Barrys) were going out to India, the fine screw transport which conveyed them took out a few scraps and detachments to join other corps. The Du Barrys were then commanded by LIEU-

TENANT-COLONEL PHILIPS, a distinguished officer who had seen no service, but whose achievements lay chiefly in bringing his regiment "to a high state of efficiency," and in suggesting and enforcing various plans which saved money to the Public Department, and which caused him to receive high and frequent commendation from the War Office. The Colonel's lady was on board, as well as the ladies of two poor lieutenants, who could not afford to leave their wives behind, or send them out overland. Some surprise however was freely expressed at this step on COLONEL PHILIPS' part, who was known to have saved a great deal of money, and "was uncommon well enough off." Indeed, it was said with some indignation that the Colonel's lady, a gentle, submissive creature, had been put on board no better appointed than a sergeant's wife. The Colonel said she was "devilish comfortable." He was very pleasant company to the young officers of the other regiments, and often sat and smoked with them in a little private corner of the deck, and was kept by them very handsomely in cigars all the voyage. It was only about the fourth or fifth day—for all had been tolerably ill—that Mr. Canby reminded the Colonel of having met him before.

The Colonel said, indifferently, "Most likely!"

(He was not smoking one of Mr. Canby's cigars.)

"Don't you remember that old house Digby and a Christmas party; it must be twelve or fourteen years ago?"

"To be sure I do," said the Colonel with interest. "Uncommon good living there was there, too; I never ate or drank better in my life." (For though the Colonel heartily grumbled at everything when it was present, he always did fair justice to what was past.)

"You know he died," went on Canby, eagerly, "that very week, I believe?"

"I heard all that," said the Colonel. "And there was a greedy beast of a Lord there, who must have well drunk himself into his coffin by this time, and a stuck-up fellow that has been screwed into a peerage since."

And the woman that acted—whose husband was

smashed on the railway—you recollect her, Colonel? Fine colour she had, and eyes! Good Heavens! I wonder what became of her. She went off with some fellow, I know. And what did she do with her sick husband? I haven't a notion. I never came across her since."

"I did, then," said the Colonel, coolly, "and not so long ago, either." There was a major and a captain or so sitting round. They were all very comfortable—a moonlight night—ship going like a yacht. "I keep my eyes open," said the Colonel; "never fall into abstraction as I walk. I'll tell you about this, for it's rather curious. When we came to Dublin, they first sent us to Beggar's Bush Barracks."

A young subaltern gave a guffaw at this name. "Oh, Colonel—come now."

"You're young, my lad, and green, and don't know better. Don't interrupt, please. Devilish good place it was: quite snug rooms, and fire places that drew. Major's quarters nearly like your own house."

Pipes were withdrawn to allow of sapient head-shaking adhesion, with "No better going." "Uncommon good—there five years." "No better in the kingdom."

"Well, Sir, we were very well off there until they must take it into their heads to move us. Some of their infernal Irish management. Just, too, as I had my carpets down, and the place warmed and nice. And they sent us off to a hole—a positive hole—not fit to put a Christian officer in—no light or air, and every fellow squeezed on top of you. On my soul, I'd have preferred one of their damned Irish cabins, pigs and all. This was their Ship Street."

Again adhesion: "Know it well." "Back of the Castle." "Infernal den."

"Why," went on the Colonel, "I had actually to take lodgings for *her*." He always thus alluded to Mrs. Philips. "There was no *room* for her at all. But we had to get through somehow. Those Dublin fellows aren't bad in their way—many a dinner I knocked out of 'em. And very well done they were, too. Best wine and

cookery, very fair attempt indeed. But what can you expect? A set of wasting, spending fellows, squandering everything to make a show. The claret they put before me—uncommon good, too—I suppose hadn't been paid for, and never would be." This strain of recollection in reference to hospitalities is not uncommon among gentlemen of the army. "And you know they've got a show there they call 'going to the Castle'? Levees and drawing-rooms, and——"

"I've been there—wretched sham of a place."

"Nothing of the kind," said the Colonel, gravely. "I have had uncommon good dinners, a hundred of us sitting down together there in St. Patrick's Hall, and better attendance I never had. And devilish good company, too. And their balls and drawing-rooms were very fair. They fished out some very pretty girls, I can tell you. And the fellow himself was always very civil to me."

"But, hang it, he aint no better than a lord at home."

"Now, my dear boy, don't show off your ignorance, please. He *is* better, because he stands for the Sovereign, don't you see. I never saw a better dinner set on a table. I assure you their vicerealty is a more sensible thing than you think."

"And was she there—Mrs. Lepell?"

"I'm coming to that. Well, as the man was civil to me, and the thing was expected, I told Mrs. P. she must get herself something and go to the man's drawing-room. I had no notion of her going about the thing in the way those harum-scarum Irish women did, covering their backs with laces and silks that they hadn't a sixpence to pay for. So I first took a walk myself down Nassau Street, a place that looks into a park."

"To be sure—Phoenix—know it well."

"You do *not* know it well," said the Colonel. "Precious fellow you, to set up to know geography."

"Phoenix, miles away—know it well," said another.

"Exactly. Well, I was going along, when I saw a window-blind—I always keep my eyes open, and look at everything—with the name, 'Madame la Rue, Milliner.'

I saw with a glance this sort of thing would do for us. I had no notion of flinging away money on the regular gang who fleece you. So I walked in and asked for Madame la Rue. I saw there was little or no work doing, only a cap or two on a wire thing, which was just the style of place I wanted. There was a woman to whom I soon explained everything—uncommon sharp she was. A very intelligent creature she was, and said that I only wanted something that would do well enough for *them*—cut up afterwards and make a decent Sunday dress. Just as I was walking down stairs, who should come stamping up, as if it all belonged to him, but young Hurst, a donkey in one of the heavy regiments, who was flinging away his good gold and silver right and left. Horses, mail phaetons, and all that. The fellow coloured when he saw me. ‘So *you’ve* found this place out, Philips,’ he said. ‘Very nice of you. I wonder does Mrs. Philips know?’ He always had a fair cigar-case (the ass’s bill to that Dublin fellow in Sackville Street I know was over a thousand), and was always forcing ‘em on you. So I merely said, as I went out, ‘I’m here on a little business *for* Mrs. Philips.’ On that the fellow burst into one of his hoarse laughs. Well, Mrs. P. came another time, and I came again, and we were going on famously, and they were dressing her up very nicely and cheaply, and it was about a couple of days from the Drawing-Room. I knew they’d be late and behind time, so I kept calling and abusing them, just to keep ‘em up. But I never saw Mrs. De la Rue. On this day I was coming up the stairs easily, when some one comes running down to meet me—not the creature that was doing for us, but some one else. It was all the same to me, so that we got our falals, so I cried out, ‘Come back here, please.’ And so she did. And I assure you no sooner did I set my eyes on her than I knew her in a trice. ‘Why,’ said I, ‘who are you?’—‘Madame De la Rue,’ she answered. ‘Hum!’ I said, ‘is my dress done?’—‘Oh, Sir,’ says she, with a sort of imploring menace, ‘I thought you were Mr. Hurst. He *promised* to come and assist me, for I am harassed and persecuted. I don’t know

what I shall do.'—'I know,' says I, coolly, 'what I shall do, if you are not up to time, and that is, make a row, the like of which you never heard in all your life.' What was her distress to me, in the way of business? 'Oh, Sir,' she said, if you only knew all that is on my mind, and the way I am hunted at every turn. I could lie down and die; and *indeed* the dress shall be ready. But if you would not mind letting us have the small sum *now*, instead of later; we have so much to meet, so much to pay out.—'Not a halfpenny, not a sixpence,' I said, plainly. I had no notion of being done in *that* way. 'And let me tell you, besides, if the things aren't up to time, I'll come down here and pull the place down—that I will, *Mrs. Lepell*, alias De la Rue.' You never saw anyone turn so pale as she did. Then she said something about, 'Oh, Sir, for the sake of those old days, take pity on us. Don't you remember dear old sweet Digby, and the happy nights there——.' I cut her short. 'Just take care you have my dress, Ma'am; those days are nothing to me. So you needn't be afraid of my saying anything if you are up to time.' With that I walked out. Well, that night, up comes a note, begging, praying, for the sake of dear old sweet Digby, and all that—But not a bit. Well, Sir, will you believe it, we never went to the Drawing-Room after all, d—n her; and I lost the first banquet, d—n her, and all the nice people. It wasn't my fault, though, for I sent an orderly down two or three times just to keep his eye on the place. But the ruffian, I suppose, went to his pot-house."

"Well? But what happened her?"

"Well, I'm coming to it. I tell you, I did not go, and I lost the banquet, the best one of the season. We drove up the day of the Drawing-Room to try on, you know, by appointment—for Mrs. P., between ourselves, never knows how to choose a decent thing to put on her back—and egad she was gone, Sir; place shut up, and sheriff's men in possession. Her friend Hurst had cut—on leave, you know—a week before; and I believe there never was a stitch put in the train at all, good or bad. The whole was a blind. I didn't care about the Draw-

ing-Room, but I lost the banquet by her. A hundred sat down, they said—finest dinner they ever gave.”

So the story was told and speculated over, and served its turn, and perhaps was told once more during the voyage out of the *Serena* transport. That subject of the Dublin Castle “banquets” had a great charm for Colonel Philips, and his eyes looked back wistfully to those Irish flesh-pots.”

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We may look again, and have another glimpse. We are on this occasion indebted to Lord John Raby. That noble person's marriage had long since been talked of, and perhaps laughed at; and had taken place with all splendour. We all recollect that half column in the fashionable journal, at St. George of Hanover's, and the Bishop of Leighton Buzzard—(the reader may recall Dean Burnaby, whom Lady Buryshaft had indeed promoted)—and the list of company, and the breakfast at the Earl of St. Ryder's at Audley Street. What came out later, however, was almost better known—namely, that Lord John had been “awfully taken in:” the fortune turning out only about one-third of what was expected. This was indeed a blow. However, on the whole, the marriage proved a great benefit to him. It was noticed that Lord John was “kept in fine order;” had to give up his Paris trip—his haunts,—and came in time even to change his free-and-easy style of conversation. Everyone marvelled. His rollicking spirits were tempered: he became sober and decorous, and even grave. He was actually the Lord John Raby who, now and again, spoke at religious meetings; and was known to have publicly reproved some free-spoken young men with great solemnity—“You shouldn't speak in that way. It is not becoming, Sir; you know, for every idle word,” &c.

But before this happy Reformation had been worked out—it took a long time—his Lordship had gone down for what he called “an outing,” to Chatham, to see his old friend, Colonel Foley, who had a small post in that great establishment. As for going any distance purely to see “an old friend,” that was not much in Lord John's

way. But there was some little festival on, or launch and dining, and his Lordship's heart was heavy, and "so egad, Sir," he told his friend, "the old lady was sick, and I bolted."

It was very pleasant down at the dockyard: and old Colonel Foley, who was very much of the same pattern as his friend, collected a few of the same description and gave a little dinner. Some of his guests were on half-pay; some on no pay at all; but all seemed to have strained eyes and rather "cherry-brandy" faces, and were well girthed and strapped. Some of these elderly gentlemen's recollections were of an odd sort: but they enjoyed them, and interchanged them, and seemed to gambol together like old nags in a paddock. Our Lord John considered himself far junior to any there present; and on the second night of his stay, he said: "Come Fol-ey, my boy, I found out you have a theatre here; and we'll bowl down quietly and see him." His Lordship had indeed been what he called looking about him, up the old lines; uneven walking enough for one of his time; down to the "yard;" through the little streets where the Quality live, and give little parties; then on to Rochester, where there is cheerful old crimson brick and a quaint air, which long may it preserve; and he had even stopped before the old almshouse, and, with his gold glasses on, had read the curious bequest of Master Richard Watts: the strict exclusion and uncomplimentary fellowship of "Rogues and Proctors," and the nightly supper and "fourpence each."

"Rum idea," said Lord John, closing his glass. "Sure to be jobbed." In which he was right; but he did not reckon on the certain security Master Watts was to have for his bequest in the grand notoriety of the story of the Seven Poor Travellers, to be read by tens of thousands. It was on this walk, which tried him a good deal, that Lord John came upon the little Theatre Royal, Rochester, and with his glasses out again, read the bill pasted on the pillar of the little porch.

Mr. T. R. Houndsditch, the manager of the T. R., Rochester, was once more appealing to his patrons of

that circuit, and, anxious to spare no pains to secure continuance of that patronage, would bring forward, on that night,

“ A DEBUTANTE,

A Lady combining

HIGH BIRTH,

Elegant accomplishments,

and

NUMEROUS GRACES OF PERSON,”

who would on that night make her courtesy to the discriminating, refined, and combined audiences of

“ CHATHAM, ROCHESTER, AND STROUD.”

“Egad, I’d like to see that,” said Lord John. “What’s her name, I wonder?” and he looked again. “Miss Jeannette St. Clair. Pish, pish!” and he made a face. “Jemima Smith, father a greengrocer.”

Accordingly Lord John and his host drove over in a fly. The little box of a theatre was filled. The pit had a mixed audience of sailors, soldiers, and roughs. The little boxes were sprinkled with a few more decent visitors. We may let Lord John himself tell what followed.

“Egad, we bespoke what they called a private box, with access to the stage, Sir; and all, I vow to Heaven, three shillings. Three shillings! why, Sir, there was a day when I thought access to the stage cheap at three guineas. That was all very well when we didn’t think much of The Four Last Things, Sir. Manager—Holdsditch, or some such name, found out devilish soon about me—and would hang about us, milording me till I was sick, and *had* to tell him to go to——; ahem—drunk, drunk as an owl. Came out to make a speech, and announce his new engagements; and began with something about the ‘blessing of the great Manager of All.’

Very good that ; uncommon good that—great Manager of all—though profane. Not right. Well, we got our bill, Sir, and saw it was our old friend Haller on her legs again. I like the play ; I do, indeed ; a devilish good moral at the end. Once, Sir, a woman falls—a woman falls, Sir. I should take a very high line. We're all fallible ; but with us it's *altogether* a different story. I always held that view. Well, I was growing impatient for her, and the other fellows were meandering on in the usual way, when, at last, on she comes. A fullish good-looking woman, rather fresh in the cheeks ; but a full growner : no 'Miss' at all in the case. I put up my glasses ; but that light is so infernal flaring and glaring, I couldn't make her out clear, and got the opera-glass. Egad, Sir, she had begun to speak. She was as frightened as—as if she was going to execution ; but when she spoke, something struck me. I clapped the opera-glass to my eyes, and I knew her, Sir ; I knew her on the spot. A woman that I could tell you stories of by the hour ; knew as well as I do you. And about whom there was as devilishly awkward a business, in a decent house—all about a husband," &c.

Lord John would come back presently to the narrative. "Not a word could any of us hear. I think she was shamming fright, and a boor of a marine in the pit called out 'Speak up, Missus !' But she had forgotten the words, and came over near us ; when she looked up, and saw me, and knew me, begad. That finished her, Sir. You never saw such a scene. You see she wasn't exactly the woman to go on that line of a first appearance ; shyness, sinking from terror, and all that. That does very well, Sir, in a *real* young creature of seventeen ; you and I'd have every indulgence ; and it's only right and proper, and charity, you know, that thinks no evil. But when it came to a stoutish woman bearin' down on five-and-thirty or forty, and a little reddish about the cheeks, it was a different story, you see. But she had devilish fine eyes of her own, Sir, and good hair ; and really when I saw her she brought back some of the old days," added his Lordship, with a touch of pathos. "Well ; there she stuck,

prompter actually bellowing at her, and old Holdsditch shaking his drunken fist at her from the wing. Then, Sir, the fellows began to hiss and hoot: and one rascal threw an orange peel at her. And egad, Sir, she showed the old stuff then: she gave them a look and a stamp; and I heard her myself say, 'Savages!' And, begad, the marines in front heard it, too; and stood up, and shouted 'Off! off!' at her; and half-a-dozen of the soldiers cried 'Shame!' and took her side, and began climbing over the benches to get at the marines. And there was going to be *such* a row; and I vow I couldn't but admire the *pluck* of the woman as she stood there, with her lips trembling, and repeating, 'Savages!' Oh, she had game in her: and do you know, I *think*, if they had given her a chance, she might have done something with Haller. But when I saw there was to be an out-and-out row, I and Foley cut—cut, Sir. And I came up to town early next morning," said this cautious Lord; "for I saw the poor wretch knew me, and would be coming about the place with her story, and her old times, and all that. We know what that means—translated—and what it all comes to; I've never seen or heard of the woman since!"

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There was nothing indeed much to see or hear of the unfortunate lady since that night. That *fiasco* seems to have been the specimen of a series of failures. What a weary profession had she entered! What is there indeed open to a woman in her position? Everything must fail. She can only try this and that for a time. That pity which Lord John so morally denied to all Mrs. Hallers, we may have of one who was fighting this desperate battle. These were almost the last stories in any distinct shape that were known of her.

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Again, gentlemen, "officers and gentlemen," meet at the conventional dinner party, and talk pleasantly, when

the ladies have gone up. The pleasant wreck is about them, snowy drapery, silver, exquisite glass, cooling and costly wines. Heliogabalus, in a dress coat and white tie, is filling and refilling, though growing purple about the "gills." Into what a curious club does human nature then resolve itself! Innocent ladies and charming dames, you little know what is discussed there; what strange talk goes on; what secrets are revealed! and, above all, how your quiet husband, that family man for whom you feel so just a contempt, changes into Lothario, and talks gallantly and with a free and easy tone that would lift the very wreath off your head.

So may we hear them now chattering pleasantly. What has become of so and so? where the deuce is so and so? Mr. Fox Bouchier is there, and someone mentioning Legai, the charming French actor, now a manager and before the public a good many years, says he remembers a night at the Duchess' Theatre, when as queer an adventure took place as you'd see in any play; and then proceeded to detail the odd and painful *esclandre* which was related in a very recent chapter of this narrative. "I wonder what became of her?" said Fox Bouchier. "I'd have given anything to have followed her up. She had spice and go in her, I can tell you. That woman has a history, I know. She'll turn up again. I should like to know, really;" and Fox Bouchier ran his fingers through his rather thin hair, and looked round, as who should say, "I would follow the matter up." "Listen to that ass!" someone whispered at the other side of the table. "I wish we had Mrs. Fox down here to listen to him!" Our old friend Selby was of this party—a sober, grave bachelor, good natured, kindly but blunt to other men. He had been listening, and then broke in suddenly.

"I could tell you the end of all *that*," he said. He was not a gossip; was indeed a silent man. But the subject had an old and a soft interest for him: and often we talk thus to others, to please our thoughts, not to please *them*.

"I can tell you how all that ended. And it ended not so long ago either; not two years ago. There's

Severne ; you know him—that married Miss Palmer
——”

“Be sure !” said Fox Bouchier, critically ; “saw her at a party ; fine bit of colour for a viscountess.”

“They had a box for the new opera—what’s the name—a thundering business, you remember ? like a dozen military bands pounding away together.”

“My dear fellow,” said Fox Bouchier, “what *are* you thinking of ? The great posthumous work, with the real earthquake—a masterpiece !”

“No matter,” said Selby. “I am not a musician. Well, I went with them to *their* box ; Severne and Lady Severne ; and were all bored. It seemed as if it was going on steadily all night, in regular watches : you know that feeling. We got away at last, and left her at home ; and then Severne and I walked down together to the club. I hadn’t seen him for ever so long, and we had a great deal to talk of. I needn’t tell you he had a very curious life, full of ups and downs. He is in port now, so it is no harm to say so.”

“No fellow better off, I can tell you : uncommon good thing he made of it.”

“It was a lovely night, with the moon out : and we didn’t go to the club at all. But we fell to talking over old times ; and actually about the very person you have been mentioning. I knew her very well ; and I knew her history. Her life was a very hard battle, poor creature : all up hill, and yet driven down hill. I always pitied her. We wandered along, and went out of Pall Mall into Charing Cross ; then up to Leicester Square and *that* direction. Turned out of *that* into a sort of street : the only reason for which was, I believe, that the moon was shining very brightly on it ; and there was a little crowd half-way down it.”

“Quite romantic,” simpered Fox Bouchier ; “we are coming to something ; I suspect, the viscount and his friend.”

“It is very odd,” said Selby in a ruminative way ; “but there *is* some mysterious connection between our thoughts and outer things. I do not know why we should have

begun to talk of that woman on that night. It was very curious : her name had never occurred to us on any other occasion."

"That *was* the reason," simpered Fox Bouchier. "Don't you see ? the very reason explains itself."

"We walked on slowly," continued the other, "until we were stopped by the crowd. A midnight row—you know that sort of thing—in front of a tavern, about one o'clock in the morning."

"I know well," says Fox Bouchier, "of course. Hay-market business every second night."

"This was not exactly a tavern—more an Italian place. The 'Café Magenta' they called it ; and it had a row of frosted windows with gilt letters on it. As we came up, we heard French and broken English ; and there was a half-savage drunken, dirty Frenchman, fighting with a woman in her hair at the door, and beating her. There were no police, as usual. 'Look at that savage ; and look at those savages,' said Severne. And the savages, though they cried 'Shame !' laughed at all the man's fury.

"The woman was dressed up in the usual showy way. You know the style of thing behind the marble bar : and the flaring gas and the gilt mirrors, earrings, and chains ; but I declare, when we were just pushing our way through, as the ruffian had his arm up for another blow, she turned her face, and said piteously, 'Is there no one of you to help a poor woman ?' I say she turned her face : and, by Jove, I knew it ; so did Severne. In a second we had shoved through them, and were beside her."

"Why, was it ?" asked Fox Bouchier. "Really, now, how curious ! Handsome woman, though, when got up."

"Ah ! greatly altered, though," said Selby, sadly. "But there was just something of the old touch in her eyes, which I knew : and the spirit with which she faced the ruffians saved her. We were beside her in a moment. Severne took the command.

"'Stand back,' he said, 'you should be ashamed of yourselves. Are you no better than this degraded French-

man, who isn't worthy to have the name of a man? If you raise your finger again,' he said to him, 'I'll knock you down—now.'

"She was looking at us with a strange look. She was beginning to know that voice. The fellow was rather cowed, and for a moment could not answer.

"'I turn her out,' he said. 'She is a wretch. She rob me. I make no money. She have pillage me—and—and who are you? What is your business to interfere?'—'Go in,' said Severne to her, 'I will take care of you. See, here are the police at last, so you had all better make off. Come in,' he said to the man. We went in. It was a dirty, low place, with a great deal of gas, and the mirrors just as we said, with a dirty waiter or two, with dirtier napkins. When we got the door shut, then the scene began. You would have pitied the poor wretch—so changed—all her spirit gone: and when she stood under the flaring gas, we could see that her cheeks were all shrunk in, and that her red colour *was* colour. Then, I say, the scene began. The Frenchman was like mad:—'This woman—she ruin—where is my money? Here do they come asking—asking, and there is none to give them. She has got it all—she has plenty. Dey will hunt us out to-morrow. Ah! you! I would kill you.' She clung to Severne, who was very kind and generous to her. 'You will help me,' she said, in a low, frightened voice. 'You will not let this man kill me. I have none of his money! Do you believe him? Look at the state he is in now. I have money! Look at me—look at these cheeks—look at that arm: I have not enough to eat—I don't know when——Do you hear that?' And then she coughed, coughed, with a strange grating, scraping cough, that made us both start. I looked down at her figure, and I remembered she was a good, portly woman."

"Fine bust, I recollect," interrupted Mr. Fox Bouchier, critically.

"And I saw she was all shrunk up, and as flat as *that*. She was telling truth, *indeed* she was. I believe she was artificial and scheming enough—and perhaps her life

would not bear looking into ; but I declare I felt from my very soul for the wan, half-starved creature cowering and shrinking there, and with all spirit literally knocked out of her.

“ ‘Look here,’ said Severne, calmly to the man. ‘Do you want some money?’

“ ‘Of course I do. How can I pay my way? I shall be ’rested; and what does that vile creature, who has plunder me——’

“The waiters were all listening indifferently; they were used I suppose to these scenes.

“ ‘Hush, hush!’ said Severne; ‘take this—that will do you for the present. Only please go away up stairs—anywhere. I happen to know this—this lady before—a long time.’

“I think she gave him a look of gratitude for that speech and for that word. My heart bled for her as I saw her in that degraded position, with her paint on, and her gewgaws hanging about her.”

“Quite romantic,” said Mr. Fox Bouchier, a sentiment that was not at all endorsed by the company, who were really interested in the story.

Selby looked at him, and said coldly, “It was *more* than a romance. I had met her at a country house at Digby, where we spent such happy weeks! She was like any other lady there then, respectable; and to find her come down to that was something of a shock. In fact, it makes me uncomfortable to think of the whole scene, and of the way she clung to us for help.

“The sight of money made the Frenchman quite calm, and even polite. He was led away by one of his waiters. ‘Go away,’ said Severne to the other, putting something, I suppose, into *his* hand, ‘and leave us.’ There we were alone in that strange place, with the gas flaring away, and the mirrors and gold, and a patch of crimson velvet here and there. And on one of these crimson velvet sofas the unfortunate woman was sitting exhausted, with her hand to her side.

“ ‘I am so glad to see you again,’ she said. ‘It gives me life again. You don’t know what I have

passed through since — the degradation — the misery. What could I do? Think the worst of me, if you please. I was driven—I did the best I could to be respectable. But the world would not let me——’

“‘Don’t think’ of that now,’ said Severne. ‘Tell us what we can do for you. You are ill, I think, in the first place. You would like to be free from this—this place?’

“‘Oh, that you should have seen me in this state,’ she said, covering her face. ‘Do you recollect Digby and Sir John—poor Sir John—and the book he gave me, “The Short Way”? I have it still. Those were days—oh, such happy days I *lived* then! But since—oh, you can have no idea what I have gone through. The misery—degradation. And yet I had my pride. I tried to live as a lady, and I made the best battle that I could. I had no money. What could I do? If I had been brought up a working woman—to a trade—anything. But I had not. Your half lady has no way of living; and all women were determined not to let me live. You were always my friend—and Mr. Selby, too. You were very kind to me: and though I did scheme and plot *to get my living*, as I live, I never schemed and plotted about you. I liked you all the time, and tried to make you my friend. And the proof,’ she said, sitting up, and with a sort of pride, ‘I knew you were in town here, and I knew where you lived: but I never wrote to ask you for anything—never! That comforts me at this moment. There is something of *the lady* in *that*, I think!’

“Severne answered her in a low voice. ‘You must leave this place—or I suppose you can stay for the night. In the morning we shall see what can be done. Think over some plan for yourself. I and Selby here will be too glad you had some mode of life more respectable than this. You have a great claim on me, a very great claim. I tried hard indeed to discover you all this long time. But for the future——’

“‘This long time!’ she said. ‘For the future! That will not stretch very far. Dear Mr. Severne, I am run out. I have no spirit or strength. Do you remember that Doctor Pinkerton, who was *my enemy*—as I used to

say—with whom I had the fearful battles? I drove him out—my little victory. But he has had his revenge. I met him not long ago: but he knew me at once, and came to me. He attends me, looks after me; now and again. That is *his* revenge. Oh, he is so kind and good! Oh, if I was beginning this world again, I should live in a different way. I see there is much kindness and goodness in this world. I did not know it—it is too late, perhaps, now.'

"We looked at her and understood her.

"There is only a Short Way indeed left to me,' she said smiling, 'this Doctor Pinkerton told me *that*. He says about a year. But I think he is wrong. I wonder it has not come long ago. Then I should have been sorry—perhaps have been frantic. But now, what I have gone through, you cannot so much as conceive. *Indeed, believe me, I made the best battle before I came down to this. Indeed* I did. But one must live, as the Frenchman said. But now there is no necessity for *that*. I am tired, and want to go home, as poor Sir John used to say, wherever that may be.'

"'You must get rid of these lugubrious thoughts,' said Severne, kindly; 'a cheerful future will be before you yet, if you will only apply your mind to it. We shall all do our best.'

"'It is nonsense,' she said, almost smiling. 'I am worn out *here*,' laying her hand on her chest. 'But you don't know all. I dare not look forward to that quiet life you speak of, even if I were well. I have spectres of my own to trouble me. My life has been long, though short enough. But somehow, in the flare of this gas, I do not see backwards, and do not think; but in the darkness I feel pain.'

"I suppose we talked on thus for an hour or more. She was a gallant creature after all, and, as she said, had gone through so much. She had really to fight for her daily bread, as she said. For every woman's—though not man's—hand was against her. It was as dismal a business, I assure you, as ever I passed through, and sent me away quite melancholy.

“ ‘A year,’ said Severne, as he went away. ‘Why, I don’t give her two months. She’s worn out with consumption.’

“As we went out she caught Severne’s hand, and drew him back. He told me afterwards what she said. ‘Don’t—*don’t* think me lost to everything because you have found me. I would have died sooner than you should have known—believe that.’

“ ‘I can—I know it. I believe you always had a regard for me. Whatever others had to complain of, I had nothing.’

“ ‘I am so glad to hear those words,’ she said, ‘from you.’

“It was arranged that she was to send in the morning and tell him what she had fixed.”

“Clever creature,” said Mr. Bouchier, “knowing, clever one. Got the hook in his gills again.”

“You shall hear,” said Selby. “She did not send that day, nor the next, and then we sent and found her place shut up, and the man bolted. She, they told us, had gone that very night, and they had never seen her since. Severne never saw her again—save once. That was like fixing a hook in his gills, as you say, eh?” He went on. “She was a genuine creature, you see, after all. I was greatly provoked, and Severne too, for we saw it was her pride; and we tried hard to make her out and get some clue, but we could not.

“Do you remember the dinner old Lutestring gave when he wanted to advertise his new gold plate? He asked me. That was three months after; and I went, saw, and ate off the gold plate.”

“I hate your metal plates; your knife always squeaks and scratches on them,” said Mr. Fox Bouchier.

“I came home very late, and as I came in I found a letter: it was from a Doctor—that Pinkerton she spoke of—who said that she was ill and dying, and wished to see me. ‘And,’ says the Doctor, ‘I think you had better lose no time, for the poor soul won’t be long in the hospital.’”

“Hospital!” they repeated, greatly taken aback by this unclean and ungenteel allusion,—“Hospital!”

"Yes, one of the great, rambling, crowded hospitals. I was very tired at the moment, and not very well, and it gave me a sort of chill. But the cab was at the door still, and I ran down and jumped in, just as I was. On the road I passed close to Severne's square: it was only a little bit out of the way, and something inspired me to go round by his house. There was a light in his window: they had been at some of *their* balls, too. I sent up word, and he came down at once; and when I told him, he got in beside me, and we drove away."

"Didn't go up and tell her Ladyship?" said Fox Bouchier, with a simper. "Egad, this looks an odd business."

"The streets were very silent," went on Selby, without taking any notice of this remark, "and we seemed to be a very long time going. You know that set of black, dirty streets you get into going towards the back parts of town, by Bishopsgate Street? They seem endless. I thought we would never have done with them. They light them worse, too, I believe, than the better parts. Severne scarcely spoke, except to say now and again, 'Unfortunate creature! what a finish! I am glad you came, though. What a life, though—what a finish!'

"We were at the place at last: a poor and struggling hospital, as we heard afterwards, with walls like a prison. We asked for 'Jane Bell,' for that was the name the poor soul had taken to hide herself. The man at the gate stared at the two gentlemen in dress coats and white ties, then showed us the way up stairs, called an old and sleepy nurse, and handed us over to her. We were in long, whitewashed galleries, with a dim jet of gas burning blue at the end. It was as dismal a journey down these passages as ever I went. It was very cold, too. 'What a finish!' I heard Severne say to himself.

"There—she had brought us now into a large, very high, whitewashed room, with a great many rickety-looking beds, but, as we could see, with only two occupied—no fire, and a dip candle that was bent crooked on the chimney-piece. We went down softly to the bed, and—there *she was*.

"Such a changed creature, even from *that* night—when she was changed enough! She seemed like a shadow—a mere ghost of herself—with no colour in her cheeks, which were all shrunk in and flattened. Severne turned away when he saw her, and motioning to me stood a little behind the curtains so that she could not see him.

"The woman brought the crooked candlestick over, snuffed its long wick with her fingers, and pulled at the bed-clothes to rouse her; then she turned her head wearily, and saw me. Her eyes—they were still the old eyes we used to talk of at Digby—lit up with some light, and she half raised herself, but fell back again. She gave a smile of pleasure;—she had rather large and rosy lips, but they were thin and pinched now. I noticed her finger went up to a bow that was under her chin, and then I saw that she had a very neat cap on—I suppose to receive company *like a lady*.

"‘Oh, you have come,’ she said; but I could hardly hear her, she spoke so thin and huskily. I had to bend down closer, to listen to her. ‘I could not have expected this—it was very kind of you. And yet I *had* a feeling that you would come to me. I had indeed.’

"‘Of course,’ I said, ‘but why are you in this place? Surely you might have known that you had friends who——’

"‘I knew you would think *that*,’ she said, ‘and that *they* would think it. But though I have had the worst of it,—yes, Mr. Selby, they have beaten me right and left—they were *too* much for my poor strength,—I had my old pride left. They didn’t drive *that* out of me, thank Heaven.’ I spoke as kindly as I could to her. ‘Well, you have done what you wished, but let us help you now, if it is not——’ and I stopped myself. But she only smiled. ‘If it is not too late. It is, I am afraid, Mr. Selby. Make *her* tell you what that Doctor said this very night. She is not attending, poor old soul! He gave me but a few hours—though, indeed, I feel a new life since you have come into the room.’ She was in fact speaking stronger. ‘Oh, you cannot fancy what I have suffered here in this *dreadful*

place! Only think, Mr. Selby, for one that *has been bred a lady*—for no one can deny *that*, can they? Let the gossips, who have always been so free with my poor name, say what they like. I made a good marriage, and had my house in Brooke Street—and—and—I might have done even better, and been as respectable as the best of them, *had they only given me a chance*. But they would not. Those women—ladies they are called—made a conspiracy against me—joined—hunted—*hunted me!* I believe men have hearts. *They* were always good to me—*they always gave me a chance.*'

She sank back exhausted after this, and lay with her eyes—they were very glowing now—fixed on the ceiling.

"‘Don't think of these things now,’ I said, ‘but let us see what can be done for you. There must be a better place here, which could do until morning—some more comforts—or——’ She shook her head.

"‘It is kind of you,’ she said, ‘oh, so kind! You were always good and true. I knew you would be wondering and thinking. Another would have written, asking for help—for money, would she not?’

"‘Yes, yes,’ I said, seeing her earnestness.

"‘Ah, yes,’ she said; ‘*but not a lady*. I had my old rags of dignity about me, and I wanted to show you I had *something* left. Not quite the adventuress your friends would have described me. *They* don't do those sort of things. And though I have suffered here, Mr. Selby—oh, so much!—I am so happy to think I held out. They could not beat me out of that. And this was what I was afraid of—that you would not know this: but now it may all end as soon as it pleases.’

"Then she was silent again, and by the light of the flaring dip, which had a long wick again, I saw her smiling at the ceiling. I would have given anything at that moment to have known how to say something—something religious or suitable; for as for beginning with anything about having hope, or thinking of one's sins, with a person like her—I mean,’ added Selby, ‘going into the conventional exhortation—it would have been mere absurdity and waste of time. And yet I am

convinced there *was* some way of putting the thing in some short and practical fashion that *would* have touched her if I only knew human nature enough to hit on it.

"Suddenly she spoke to me. 'Did you remark also I sent to *you*, not to him? Not for the world would I have done it, though you recollect he *told* me to do so. Oh! Mr. Selby,' she said, half raising herself; 'I am getting very tired, and feel a very cold hand *here*,' as she laid her hand on her poor chest—'as if I was all sinking in! But I wanted you to tell him, when you see him: it might have looked like neglect; but it *was* not: indeed, no. But it would be an inexpressible comfort to me to know, that *he* thought I was *not* the creature they all said I was; at least not towards *him*. For he was always good, and like a gentleman; and though I deceived him in a little thing or so, yet I was driven to it by the sort of *game* as they call it, which I had to play to *get my crust*. You will say I thought of him, and was so gratified; and it would have been a comfort to have seen him, even here in this place: but, as I say, it was only my old pride—and——'

"At this moment he came out softly from behind the curtain. He took her hand, and bent over her, and spoke to her very kindly and tenderly. 'I have come,' he said, 'and I have heard; and I believe what you say. But you should not have done this; you should have sent to me. Don't be cast down: better days will come, and *are* coming. We shall get you well, or better. And in the morning, the first thing, we shall get you away from this place, and then——'

"She shook her head, and smiled. 'In the morning, yes—I shall be away from this place. But I am so happy,' she continued, 'that you have come; and indeed I am glad that you have heard. It was so *good* of you. But it was time that it should all end. I was getting weary, and very tired; for,' she added, with a face of terror, 'you cannot guess all I have *gone through* within the last few months—real suffering—real agony! You know I was brought up to be a lady; and indeed my life has *not* been pleasant, though it seemed so. I was

always beginning again, and latterly, Mr. Severne, *always being beaten*—they were too much for me. That sort of thing sickens one to death: one loses heart: and so at last I gave way, and gave over striving; and then I was swept down—*down to this!* But I never sent to you—never; and all through I did not scheme against you,—don't think *that*,—though I appeared to do so. Do you recollect the old days at Digby? I never forgot how you took my part there; you were kind to me. What a life since! what ups and downs!—most *downs* with me! And yet it might have all turned out well. Surely *I was not meant to end in this wretched, degrading, squalid way!*—in this wretched place! in all this suffering and agony! Oh, Heaven help me!’

“She gave a sort of cry. Severne soothed her and comforted her very tenderly.

“‘Don't leave me here,’ she said, catching at his hand; ‘it is killing me. The bleakness and barrenness is destroying me: you know I have not been accustomed to it. It is all so cold—at the heart. But I am so glad you are with me.’

“‘Yes,’ said Severne, ‘and we shall stay. Don't be afraid. Cheer up. And now listen to me for a second.’ And he bent over her, but I could hear what he whispered. ‘You know I am your friend, and always was; and I should like to think that you were happy. You know I am no preacher, and never was; but still, at this moment, just a thought—a prayer—’

“She put out her hand. ‘Ah! I would do much for you. But—but—they called me *an actress*. I can't *act here*. That is all over now. Why should I act with you? I remember this saying in an old church—was it at Digby?—about a leopard changing its spots. And Jenny Bell, at the last ten minutes, is to change hers? No, no, dear Mr. Severne, I am open and straightforward in *that*.’

“‘Never was there so fatal a delusion,’ said Severne, passionately. ‘I am your friend, I tell you. A single thought, a single wish, a prayer—these things have done much before. At a time like this, as much can be done

in a minute as in a year. There is no acting in *that*. Listen to me, dear Jenny.'

" 'Acting!' she repeated, with her eyes on the white ceiling; 'do you remember the old night of the charades, and our little battles? You thought I was very bitter then—though indeed I was not. And Lord John—he came to see me a good deal—I knew him very well. He always treated *me like a lady*—always. He got me to Lady St. Ryder's, and I took her—my daughter—Lord John—Helen. She and *her father* don't quite approve of this, but——'

"I heard Severne again whispering—'Just one thought—one word.'

" 'There it is again!' she said, her face all contracting with terror, 'that cold hand, spreading over my chest. Tell them—tell Mr. Severne—I shall wait in the *cloak-room*.'

"The old nurse, rousing by instinct from a sort of torpor, said, 'There, it's coming now.'

"Severne could not speak. She was feeling about a little wildly with her fingers, and caught his hand.

" 'Tell him,' she said—so softly that I could not hear, but he told me after—'*that I shall wait in the cloak-room!*'

"It was not very long in coming after that."



Selby drew the decanter over, and drank off a glass of sherry.

"No one going to take more claret?" said the host.

"What do you say—suppose we go up to the ladies?"

THE END.

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